



## Care After Your Tonsillectomy

Tonsils and adenoids are part of the lymphatic system, which helps to fight infection. Although the tonsils and adenoids also help to fight infection, since they represent only a small portion of the body's total lymphatic system, there is no threat to health if they are removed. The circular-shaped tonsils are found on both sides of the entrance to the throat, and can be so small you can hardly see them, or as large as ping-pong balls. The adenoids are located high in the throat, above the soft palate, and usually can't be seen without special instruments.

It used to be common medical practice to remove a child's tonsils whenever the child had tonsillitis, which is an infection of the tonsils. Although this is still a useful operation, it's now done much less often. Since most cases of tonsillitis are treated more easily and effectively with antibiotics than with surgery, a tonsillectomy is only recommended for people with chronic tonsillitis. A chronic condition means that you have four to six severe infections a year, or you develop a severe infection in the tonsils that doesn't respond to drug treatment. A chronic condition also includes when the adenoids seem to be causing frequent ear infections, or in the rare event that your tonsils and adenoids grow large enough to interfere with breathing, swallowing, or sleeping.

Tonsillectomy is done under general anesthesia, and in some cases may be done as outpatient surgery. This means that after recovering from the anesthesia, you may go home to rest. In other cases, depending on the doctor's judgment, you may be advised to stay in the hospital for only a day or so.

If you are scheduled for a tonsillectomy and adenoidectomy, plan to take one to two weeks off from work or school. During this time, avoid strenuous activities, such as bicycle riding, jogging, weightlifting, or aerobic exercise. These types of vigorous activities may stimulate bleeding from the site of the operation. However, you should make a point to get up and gradually move around a bit in order to help your lungs fully recover from the anesthesia. If weather permits, go outside for a short walk.

Most patients experience a painful sore throat and earache after the surgery. These symptoms can last anywhere from a few days to two weeks. Usually, your doctor will prescribe a pain medication, and you should take these drugs as directed.

Typically, most patients don't want to drink because of sharp ear pain and sore throat. But no matter how painful it is, you should drink lots of liquids, such as water, or tea. Sucking on crushed ice or a Popsicle is also a good idea. Since small children can easily become dehydrated, they especially need liquid more than food.

After the tonsillectomy you will see what looks like white blisters or a heavy white coating at the back of your throat. These are actually scabs, which normally fall off about five to 12 days after the surgery. Avoid eating hard, crunchy foods during this time, because these could make the scabs come off before they are ready and cause bleeding.

If you notice an unusual amount of bleeding in or around your mouth, gargle with ice water. If the bleeding does not stop after gargling, you should report to the Emergency Room. You should also contact your health care professional if you develop a fever of over 101 degrees.

**If you have any questions or concerns, please call our office at 408.236.6405**

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