

Tonsillectomy

What are tonsils?

Tonsils are glands in the throat. There is one tonsil on each side of the throat. They are there to fight germs.

Do I need them?

Your body can still fight germs without them. We only take them out if they are doing more harm than good.

Why take them out?

We will only take tonsils out if the patient is getting recurrent sore throats despite treatment with antibiotics. The other main reason for removing tonsils is if they are large and block the airway causing severe snoring at night. A quinsy is an abscess that develops alongside the tonsil, as a result of tonsil infection. A quinsy is most unpleasant and once one has occurred, there is a high chance of another at a later date. People who have had a quinsy therefore often choose to have a tonsillectomy to prevent another quinsy developing. A rapid increase in the size of a tonsil, ulceration or bleeding can occur if a tumour of the tonsil develops. Tumours of the tonsil are rare.

Before the operation

Arrange for a couple of weeks off work. Let us know if you have a chest infection or severe tonsillitis before your admission date because it may be better to postpone the operation.

How is the operation done?

You will be asleep under general anaesthetic. We take the tonsils out through the mouth and then stop the bleeding. This takes about 30 minutes.

How long will I be in hospital?

In most hospitals, surgeons prefer tonsillectomy patients to stay in hospital for one night. In some hospitals tonsil surgery is done as a day case, if your home is close to the hospital. Either way, we will only let you go home when you are eating and drinking and feel well enough.

Can there be problems?

Tonsil surgery is very safe but every operation has a small risk. The most serious problem is bleeding. This may need a second operation to stop it. One adult out of every 10 who have their tonsils out will need to be taken back into hospital because of bleeding. However, only one adult out of every 50 will need a second operation. Please let us know before surgery if anyone in the family has a bleeding problem.

During the operation there is a very small chance that we may chip or knock out a tooth, especially if it is loose, capped or crowned. Please let us know if you have any teeth like this.

Your throat will be sore

Your throat will be sore for approximately ten days. It is important to take pain killers regularly, half an hour before meals for at least the first week. Do not take aspirin because it may make you bleed.

Eat normal food

Eating food will help your throat to heal. It will help the pain too. Drink plenty and stick to bland, non spicy food. Chewing gum may also help the pain.

You may have sore ears

This is normal. It happens because your throat and ears have the same nerves. It does not mean that you have an ear infection.

Your throat will look white

This is normal while your throat heals. You may also see small threads in your throat – they are used to help stop the bleeding during the operation and they will fall out by themselves.

Some people get a throat infection after surgery, usually if they have not been eating properly. If this happens you may notice a fever and a bad smell from your throat. Call your GP or the hospital for advice if this happens.

You will need 10 to 14 days off work

Make sure you rest at home away from crowds and smoky places. Keep away from people with coughs and colds. You may feel tired for the first few days.

Bleeding can be serious

If you notice any bleeding from your throat, you must see a doctor. Call your GP, call the ward, or go to your nearest hospital casualty department.