

South Manchester University Hospitals NHS Trust
Patient Advice Sheet on Tonsillectomy
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What are tonsils?

Tonsils are lumps of special tissue in the throat. There is one each side. They are at the back of the palate and tongue. They are made of lymphoid tissue. Lymphoid tissue traps germs and makes antibodies to fight infection.

Do I need them?

No. Your body can fight infection without them. You have plenty of other similar tissue. Yours are doing more harm than good. There is only one difference between people with and without tonsils. If you have tonsils you can get tonsillitis. If you don't then you can't.

Why take them out?

To stop frequent severe sore throats causing time off work or school. Say if you've had tonsillitis five to six times over more than a year. Some small children have huge tonsils which block their breathing at night. Severe tonsillitis can cause an abscess in the throat. This is called a quinsy. There are other reasons that sometimes make it necessary to remove them and the doctor will explain the reason for their removal.

Do I have to have my tonsils out?

No. It is your choice. We call this elective. The attacks will probably keep happening.

Do I need to take care before my operation?

Tell us if you have a sore throat or cold in the week beforehand. It may be better to leave it for a few weeks.

How is the operation done?

You are taken to the anaesthetic room. You will be made to sleep by an anaesthetist. They are doctors who specialize in this. They will explain the anaesthetic to you. When you are asleep we take you into the theatre. We take your tonsils out through your mouth. It takes about 30 minutes. You will wake up in the recovery room. This is next door to the operating theatre. You will be in the operating department for about an hour.

How long will I be in hospital?

You come on the day of the operation. We will let you go home the same day or the day after the operation if you are eating and drinking and feel well enough.

How should I travel home?

You may have a bleed. It is best to go home in a car or a taxi. Avoid public transport.

Can there be problems?

Tonsil surgery is very safe. But every operation and anaesthetic has a small risk. This is much the same as the risks of everyday life. For example, crossing the road, driving a car, flying in a plane. The most common problem is bleeding. This may need a second operation to stop it. It does not happen often. It happens in about one in a hundred cases in our unit. It may occur at any time from the start of the operation until the throat is fully healed. It is most common in the first 6 hours and at around the 6th day.

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. Some people feel sick after the operation. This settles quickly.

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Sometimes in children the voice alters a little. Nearly always this is just for a short time.

What do I do after the operation?

Rest at home for a week or two while your throat heals. Go back to school or work then. If you are not sure ask your GP.

Fresh air is good but keep away from crowded places.

Don't do anything which makes you hot or flushed.

Ask your nurse if you need a sick note.

You may also feel tired for the first few days.

Will my throat be sore?

Your throat will be sore for the first few days. It may well get worse for a few days. After about the fifth day it gradually gets better. Take the painkillers you are given regularly half an hour before meals for the first few days. Do not take more than it says on the label. **DO NOT TAKE ASPIRIN - IT CAN MAKE YOU BLEED.**

What should I eat?

Eat as normally as possible and drink plenty. Eating will help your throat to heal. It will help the pain too. It is the chewing and swallowing which helps. Chewing gum will also help the pain. Avoid foods that can make the tonsil area sore.

What will my throat look like?

White patches will form where the tonsils used to be. This may take a day or two. This is normal healing. It is not an infection! The lining of the throat around the white patches will go red. This is also natural. Healing needs a good blood supply.

Why have I got sore ears?

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

What if my throat bleeds?

If you have any persistent bleeding you must see a doctor. Call your GP or the ward. Or go to the nearest Accident & Emergency department.

May I ask a question?

At any time. You can also refuse to have the operation at any time. If you ask a question please ask someone suitable. A junior doctor or nurse may not know what you want to know. Please do not ask several doctors the same question and compare answers.