

## Tonsils



Tonsillitis is a very frequent disease in children and young adults particularly. Its effects can cause severe disruption of schooling, work and impairment of quality of life with multiple episodes of infection each year. For those who suffer such recurrent attacks, tonsillectomy is a curative procedure, which is simple and very effective. It rapidly produces a vast improvement in quality of life. Sometimes tonsils are also removed because they are so enlarged they impair breathing – especially at night. Tonsils are also occasionally removed if one is enlarged compared to the other. In such cases, where there is suspicion that a tumour may lie within, the tonsil is sent for laboratory analysis. The operation takes about 30 minutes and is sometimes carried out together with an adenoidectomy, especially in young children. Adenoids are made of the same lymphoid material as tonsils, but they (unlike tonsils) usually shrivel up and disappear in teenage years. The procedure requires a general anaesthetic and most tonsillectomy cases may go home the same day. The average patient requires 10 days off school or work. Unfortunately, it is a painful operation and strong painkillers are prescribed. It is difficult to swallow easily, but oral intake must be strongly encouraged, especially liquids. There are no restrictions on what can be taken orally, although most find hot, spicy foods, strong alcohol and acidic substances such as orange or pineapple juice difficult. Manuka honey diluted in warm water can be soothing. Gargling is fine, and cool saltwater is best, but it is not essential. Typically, the pain gets worse (peaks about day 5-6) before starting to improve, This is normal. So too is earache, since the tonsils share the same nerve as the ear. The tonsil beds (where the tonsils were removed typically have a yellow-whitish appearance after surgery for two-three weeks. This is also normal and can cause halitosis. Bleeding indicates infection and requires prompt treatment. If simply causing blood-stained spit, oral antibiotics are needed, but if untreated it may progress to severe hemorrhage, requiring emergency hospital admission, possible transfusion and surgery. This is rare, occurring in less than 5% of cases, but if it occurs, the patient should go directly to A&E at Northwick Park Hospital, Harrow. There is a fallacy that “tonsils are no longer removed” which is perpetuated by some GP’s. This is complete rubbish. It is an economic drive by the government and the PCT’s (Primary Care Trusts – for whom GP’s

work) to cut healthcare expenditure in a cynical way, at the expense of those suffering. Many research papers show huge benefit by severe and long-term tonsillitis sufferers.