



Adult Tonsillectomy

Tonsillectomy is performed in adults for several reasons, including recurrent infection, bothersome tonsil 'stones,' obstructive sleep apnea, history of peritonsillar abscess or concern for a cancerous process. It involves going completely to sleep in an operating room.

The surgery is quite painful, and it will probably hurt to eat and talk. You will be prescribed pain medications to help with this, but be aware that you will still be uncomfortable despite these medications.

The biggest concern with the pain medication is its effect on your breathing and alertness. Every year, numerous people die nationwide because of overdosing on pain medication. As strange as it sounds, this is because pain medications can make you forget to breathe. Because of this catastrophic risk, we are not overly aggressive with pain medications. We'll work together to try to find a good and safe regimen for you. It is also important to have a friend or family member stay with you for the first couple of days and nights to ensure you are not too groggy or forgetting to breathe. This is of particular concern in the subsequent hours after you take the first few doses of pain medications. For this reason, taking extra doses of pain medications is risky and not advised.

The risks of surgery on the tonsils include the general risks of anesthesia, infections such as pneumonia and bleeding. Post-operative bleeding occurs in about 2% of cases and can occur at any time during the first two weeks after surgery. It is impossible to predict who will have a bleeding complication. If it happens, it is imperative to call the office or the on-call provider for advice. Alternatively, you can go straight to the emergency room for evaluation.

Treatment of a bleeding complication is usually done in the office, but it sometimes requires returning to the operating room and going back under general anesthesia. In extremely rare cases, we may recommend a blood transfusion.

Because swallowing is painful after surgery, you may have difficulty staying hydrated. Likewise, pain medications can have the unwanted side effect of causing nausea, which also makes it hard to stay hydrated. We can give you medications for this. Occasionally, if you are not able to stay hydrated adequately at home, you may need to go to urgent care or the emergency room to have an intravenous line inserted and fluids administered for rehydration.

Post-Operative Instructions, Information & Tips

1. Stay hydrated! Put much more emphasis on drinking than eating. Avoid citrus drinks during this time, as their acidic nature will be very uncomfortable. Getting dehydrated significantly intensifies the pain and makes it harder to keep on top of pain control.
2. Avoid eating hard or sharp foods such as chips and firm bread. Good alternatives include applesauce, yogurt and pasta.
3. You will lose weight during the recovery period. That is okay. Stay hydrated!
4. Low-grade fevers are common following throat surgery. If you have a fever greater than 101.5 degrees, you should contact your doctor's office or proceed to an emergency room. If you are unusually confused or overly lethargic, it may be a sign of other problems. Contact our office or go to an emergency room.
5. It is not uncommon to also have associated pain in the ears, jaw or even neck area.
6. Another typical side effect is bad breath. Fortunately, it is not a sign of infection but just normal healing.
7. Please don't try to brush or gargle in the back of your throat, as it could dislodge a scab and result in bleeding.
8. It is not uncommon to spit up small amounts of blood on the day of surgery or even the day after surgery. However, if you develop significant amounts of bleeding, you need to contact our office or go to the emergency room immediately. Significant bleeding includes constantly spitting bright red blood, vomiting dark brown or red liquids or any other bleeding that concerns you.
9. Recovery can take up to three weeks, although most patients have started to turn the corner and are feeling better usually by day 10–12. There are no absolute restrictions on when to return to work/school; return when you feel up to it.
10. In addition to pain medication, other measures can help with pain:
 - Drinking cool liquids
 - Ice packs to the outside of the neck (can substitute frozen bags of vegetables, berries, etc.)
11. The medicine given to you during surgery can make you feel sleepy, lightheaded or experience temporary memory loss. These symptoms should slowly wear off during the first 24 hours. Due to these effects, you should NOT:
 - Stay alone (have someone stay with you at home for the first 24 hours).
 - Drive a car, operate machinery or power tools.
 - Drink any alcoholic beverages.
 - Make any important decisions or sign legal documents.
 - Take any tranquilizers, sleeping medications or a nonprescription medication for 24 hours.