Tonsils and Adenoids Surgery and Care

Who should you call when you need an ENT?

The Choice is Clear

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What are Tonsils and Adenoids?

The tonsils and adenoids are oval collections of tissue similar to the lymph nodes found in the neck, groin and armpits. Tonsils are the two masses located in the back of the throat, on the right and left sides. A thin layer of moist skin, called the anterior tonsillar pillar, covers the front part of the tonsils. The uvula hangs down from the middle of the soft palate located between the tonsils.

The adenoids are located above the soft palate, high on the back wall of the throat near the Eustachian tubes. These masses are not visible through the mouth without special instruments. The Eustachian tubes are small air passages that connect the space under the eardrum with the back of the nose. When you clear your ears on an airplane, you are equalizing air pressure through these tubes.

The primary purpose of the tonsils and adenoids is to trap and destroy viruses and bacteria. Some children and adults are prone to develop infections of the tonsils and adenoids. These infections can be caused by many different kinds of bacteria; although the one most people hear about is streptococcus (strep throat). If these infections are especially severe, or if they occur frequently, it may be best to remove the tonsils and/or adenoids.

Removing the tonsils or adenoids does not cause any problems with the immune system. In fact, if frequent infections have been a problem, then removing them can make the immune system’s job easier. Large adenoids and tonsils blocking the airway can cause heavy snoring, constant mouth breathing, or apnea. This can be another reason for surgery in certain patients. In some cases, a person’s overall health can be significantly improved by removal of the tonsils and/or adenoids. Each patient is different and results may vary.

Benefits of surgery can include fewer sore throats, decreased snoring and mouth breathing, fewer ear infections, fresher breath, and improved quality of voice. If surgery is recommended, and you proceed, we will schedule the surgery and assist you with any necessary insurance pre-authorization. Your child’s otolaryngologist will perform the tonsillectomy and/or adenoidectomy at the Virginia, Ear, Nose & Throat Surgery Center (a private AAAHC-accredited center developed to minimize the stress associated with traditional surgery settings). The surgery can also be performed as an outpatient procedure at a local hospital.

Tonsillectomy and Adenoidectomy

Once your child’s surgery is scheduled, you will be given pre-operative and post-operative instructions. The night before surgery, your child should not eat or drink anything after midnight. On the morning of surgery, the anesthesia care team will gently put your child to sleep. The surgeon will then remove the tonsils and/or the adenoids. The procedure takes approximately 30 minutes.

Your child will usually be ready to go home 2 hours after surgery. Before you leave, a nurse will review postoperative instructions and answer any questions you may have. Your child may still be drowsy or have some nausea from the anesthesia when you leave the hospital.

Recovering at Home

You should have cool drinks and cold desserts ready at home. These snacks will soothe your child’s throat and help him/her get enough fluid. Be sure to give your child enough time at home to recover. Limit activity for two weeks following surgery. Also, expect your child to have some ear pain one to two weeks after a tonsillectomy. Call the doctor if medication does not relieve the pain.

It is very important to watch your child’s diet following surgery, paying particular attention to:

- **Fluids** – Give your child lots of fluids, such as water, popsicles, diluted non-acidic juices, and non-carbonated caffeine-free drinks.
- **Nutrients** – Serve soft foods, such as gelatin, ice cream, pudding, scrambled eggs, pasta, and mashed foods.
- **Avoid** – Hot, spicy and rough foods such as high-citrus fruits, toast, crackers & potato chips.

Medications may be prescribed for your child. Use only medications approved by your child’s doctor, and use as directed.

- **Pain medication** may be prescribed for ear pain or to help with swallowing.
- **Antibiotics** may be prescribed to avoid infection.
- **Avoid medicines that contain ibuprofen or aspirin**. They may cause bleeding. Medicines with acetaminophen are a better choice.

When to Call the Doctor

White patches in the throat are not a sign of infection, but are normal and part of the healing process after surgery. However, they may cause bad breath. Bleeding may also occur after the first week, when the white patches come off. Keeping the throat moist with fluids will help prevent crusting and bleeding.

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