Intermountain® Healthcare

Tonsillectomy: *Preparing for Surgery*

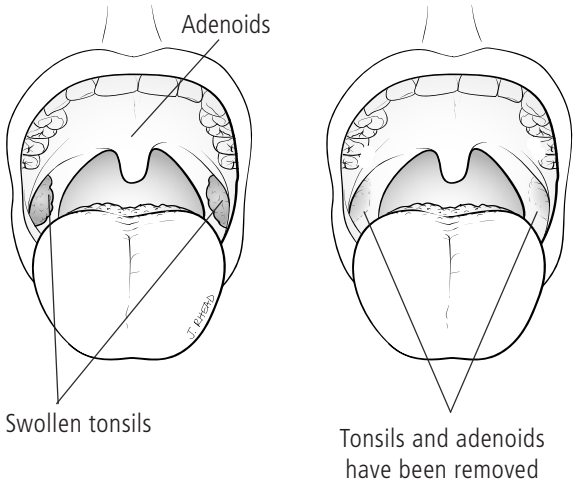
Tonsils are lumps of lymph tissue on both sides of the back wall of the throat, just above and behind the tongue. Tonsils trap bacteria and viruses that enter the body through the throat, and make antibodies to help fight infection. **Adenoids** are above and behind the roof of the mouth, where the nose and mouth join. The adenoids work with the tonsils to help defend the body against infection.

What is tonsillectomy?

Tonsillectomy is surgery to remove your tonsils. Your doctor may recommend it if your tonsils become swollen or infected often and medication doesn't help. You may have your adenoids removed at the same time. Having a tonsillectomy won't make you have more infections. Your body will fight infection in other ways.

Your doctor may recommend removing your tonsils, adenoids, or both if you have these symptoms:

- Frequent or ongoing sore throats or throat infections
- Trouble breathing or swallowing
- Swollen tonsils or abnormal tissue growth
- Ongoing bad breath



After your tonsils are taken out, you should be feeling back to normal within 1 to 2 weeks.

Talking with your doctor about this procedure

Before your tonsillectomy, your doctor will meet with you to describe the surgery and discuss the potential benefits, risks, and alternatives. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Your discussion with your doctor is the most important part of learning about tonsillectomy.

Potential benefits	Risks and potential complications	Alternatives
Benefits may include: • Fewer sore throats and infections • Improved breathing and swallowing • Improved general health	Complications with tonsillectomy are not common. With all surgeries, however, there are certain risks. These may include: • Allergic reaction to anesthesia • Bleeding during surgery or recovery • Infection (rare)	Alternatives may include: • Antibiotic treatment • Biopsy of unusual tissue growth

How do I prepare for surgery?

Before your surgery, you'll need to talk to your surgeon about these things:

- **Medications.** Tell your doctor about ALL the medications you take. This includes prescribed and over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and supplements. Your doctor may ask you to **stop** taking certain anti-inflammatory medications, such as Advil or Motrin.
- **Patient history.** Tell your doctor if you have ever had bad reactions to anesthesia, antibiotics, or other medications.
- **Questions.** Ask your doctor or nurse when and where you should arrive, what medications you should stop, and what to expect for your recovery.

You'll also need to make sure you have someone drive you home after the surgery and stay with you for the rest of the day.

What happens the day of surgery?

For most patients, tonsillectomy is an outpatient surgery. That means you won't spend the night in the hospital. When you arrive at the hospital, you will be greeted by a healthcare provider who will help prepare you for surgery. Your preparations will include the following:

Before surgery

- **Antibiotics.** You may be given antibiotic medication to help prevent infection during surgery.
- **Anesthesia.** You will be given general anesthesia so you sleep and don't feel anything during surgery.

During surgery

- **Breathing tube.** After you are asleep, the anesthesia provider will place a breathing tube in your throat to protect your airway.
- **Tonsillectomy**. The surgeon may remove your tonsils using a surgical knife or a specialized tool that uses heat or sound waves. Once they're removed, the doctor may send them to a laboratory for evaluation. If not, the doctor will discard them in a special way.

After surgery

- **Recovery from anesthesia.** After surgery you will be taken to a recovery area where you will be watched until you awake from the anesthesia.
- **Pain management.** Most patients have pain after surgery. You may feel it in your throat, ears, jaw, or neck. You will be given pain medication as a liquid rather than a pill. Liquids are easier to swallow. If the pain medication does not control your pain, be sure to tell your doctor or nurse.
- **Going home.** You will remain in the hospital or clinic until your doctor feels you have recovered enough to go home.

What should I expect in the first few days after surgery?

After the procedure, you'll feel some side effects for several days. You should be back to normal within 2 weeks. These are some effects you might experience:

- Pain. Most patients feel pain in their throat, ear, or when opening their mouth. Taking your pain medication as prescribed will help.
- Light bleeding. You may have a small amount of blood in your saliva.
- Trouble swallowing.
- Nausea and vomiting.
- Bad breath.
- Slight fever (less than 101º F).
- White patches of skin over the surgery site.

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