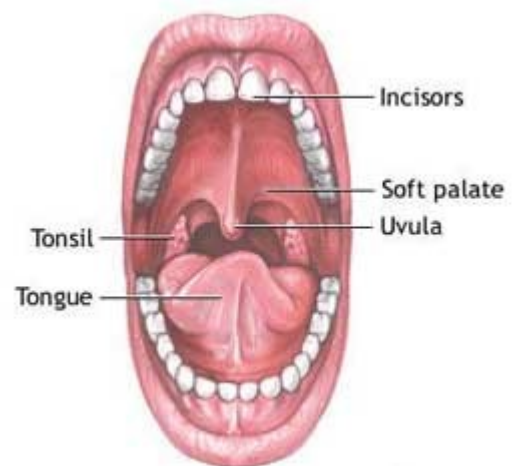




East Lancashire Hospitals  
NHS Trust

# Tonsillectomy



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**Safe | Personal | Effective**

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## What are the tonsils?

The tonsils are part of a group of lymphoid tissues (like the glands in the neck) that help to fight off infection from germs that are breathed in or swallowed. As you get older, your tonsils become less important to fight infection.

## How does tonsillitis happen?

Tonsillitis happens if the tonsils become infected. This causes pain, fever and difficulty swallowing and can make you / your child feel unwell. Tonsillitis usually gets better within seven to ten days. Antibiotics may help if the tonsillitis is due to bacterial infection. However, tonsillitis is often due to a virus and antibiotics do not help.

A tonsillectomy is recommended as a general rule if tonsillitis is frequent. For **children** a tonsillectomy is recommended when the child has had at least five attacks in twelve months. For **adults** fewer attacks are needed before a tonsillectomy is recommended, as attacks tend to be more severe (sometimes needing treatment in hospital) and there is less likelihood of the attacks stopping on their own.

It is important to realise that sore throats, such as those that happen with a common cold, will still happen after a tonsillectomy. The operation prevents tonsillitis, but will not prevent all sore throats.

## What are the benefits of surgery?

A tonsillectomy will prevent you / your child from getting tonsillitis and the resulting pain, fever and difficulty swallowing.

## Are there any alternatives to surgery?

Surgery is recommended, as it is the only dependable way to stop tonsillitis that keeps on coming back. In **children**, a long course of antibiotics may break a cycle of frequent infections or the tonsillitis may simply stop after a few years. In **adults**, this treatment is less likely to be effective, especially following glandular fever.

## USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

If you are **unwell or cannot attend** for your surgery please contact our admissions officer as soon as possible on:

01254 733787

If you are concerned or worried about anything to do with your procedure in the first **48 hours following** it please contact us for advice on:

**ENT Outpatients: 8am—5pm on:**

01254 734544

Or

**Ward B14 at any time on:**

01254 735185

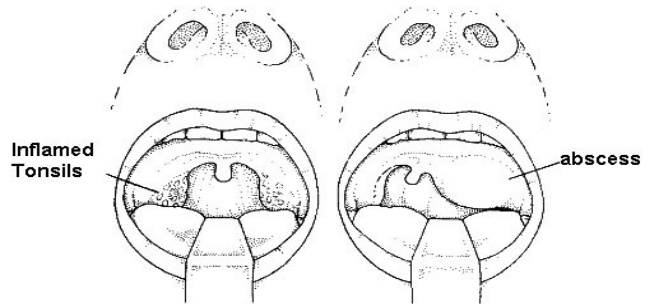
**After this time please contact your own GP**



## What will happen if I decide not to have the operation?

Occasionally, an abscess may form behind the tonsil. This is known as a “quinsy” and needs the pus to be removed through a needle and treatment with antibiotics.

Rarely, the infection may spread further into the tissues of the neck causing a retro or pharyngeal abscess. This is a serious complication and needs an operation to drain away the infection.



## What does the operation involve?

The operation is performed under a general anaesthetic.

The surgeon will perform the tonsillectomy through the patients mouth using a variety of methods.

## What should I do about my medication?

You should continue your normal medication unless you are told otherwise. Let your surgeon know if you are on **warfarin** or **clopidogrel** or **aspirin**. Follow your surgeons advice about stopping this medication before the operation.



## What complications can happen?

The healthcare team will try to make your operation as safe as possible. However, complications can happen. Some of these can be serious and can even cause death. You should ask your doctor if there is anything you do not understand.

The complications fall into three categories:

### 1 complications of anaesthesia

Your anaesthetist will be able to discuss with you the possible complications of having an anaesthetic.

### 2 General complications of any operation

- **Pain** which happens after every operation but is not a serious problem. After a tonsillectomy a bad sore throat will result and this will require regular pain killers to be taken. The healthcare team will try to reduce the pain. They will give your child medication to control the pain. It is important that your child takes the medication as you are told
- **Bleeding** during surgery or in the following two weeks. Occasionally another operation is needed to stop the bleeding. If the bleeding is heavy you / your child may need a blood transfusion.
- **Infection** which can result in bleeding during the first two weeks after surgery (risk: 1 in 100). A sign of infection can be increasingly bad breath. Treatment involves antibiotics or occasionally another operation if the bleeding does not stop quickly.

### 3 Specific complications of a tonsillectomy

- **Soreness** at the corner of your / your child's mouth.
- **Small pieces of tonsil may be left behind** (tonsil remnants). These remnants can continue to become infected and cause tonsillitis.
- **Lingual tonsillitis**. There is some tonsil tissue at the back of the tongue. Sometimes this tissue will develop tonsillitis after the real tonsils have been removed
- **Taste disturbance** which may take some weeks to recover
- **Damage** to teeth/lips/gums/oral cavity/pillars/palate/pharyngeal wall

## How soon will I / my child recover?

### In hospital

**Children:** After the operation your child will be transferred to the recovery area and then to the ward. If your child is under five or has any medical problems they may stay in hospital overnight otherwise they may go home on the same day.

**Adults** should be able to go home on the same day.

You / your child will not be able to go home unless eating properly. It is important to eat food that needs to be chewed and swallowed. This keeps the muscles at the back of the throat moving. If the muscles seize up, the pain will get worse.

If you are worried about anything, in hospital or at home, ask a member of the healthcare team. They should be able to reassure you or identify and treat any complications.

### At home

The pain will last for up to two weeks. It will tend to be worse first thing in the morning. Ensure you take the painkillers as prescribed.

### Returning to normal activities

Your surgeon will tell you when your child can return to normal activities. You / Your child will need two weeks off school / work to avoid catching an infection that could lead to bleeding.

