

Caring for Your Child After a Tonsillectomy

What is a tonsillectomy?

A tonsillectomy is surgery to remove lymph tissue (tonsils) that lies on either side of the back of the throat.

What to Expect

After you go home you may expect:

- Sore throat, mostly when you swallow. This may last 7-10 days.
- Ear, jaw, and neck pain. It may not start until 3-4 days after surgery. This may last for 7-10 days.
- Try to avoid excess clearing of the throat.
- Your child may have nausea and vomit. Your doctor may prescribe a medicine to help with this at home.
- A low grade fever is normal, up to 102°F for up to 7 days after surgery.
- A yellow-grey membrane where the tonsils were removed. It will slowly go away as the area heals, often in 3-4 weeks.
- Restless, disturbed sleep or bad dreams may occur for a couple of weeks.
- Bad breath. Your child's breath may be bad smelling for many days while the throat is healing. Drinking plenty of liquids helps decrease the odor.

Pain Relief

Your doctor will suggest medicine for sore throat and ear pain. Be sure to focus on pain control so that your child can drink plenty of fluids.

- Give pain medicines for the first 48-72 hours around the clock.

- Your doctor may suggest giving acetaminophen (Tylenol®) and ibuprofen. You will be told of the dosages for both medicines on the day of surgery.
- A prescription may also be given for severe pain. It may be used as directed if acetaminophen (Tylenol®) and ibuprofen don't relieve the pain.
- Try to time the pain medicine so that your child takes it about 1 hour before meals. This will help to decrease pain when they swallow.
- An ice pack may help. You may want to put a small bag of frozen corn or peas in a plastic bag and wrap it in a towel. Place it on the throat for 20 minutes at a time.
- A humidifier or vaporizer may ease throat soreness.

Activity

Limit your child's activity for one (1) week.

- Your child should avoid strenuous exercise and activity, swimming, or lifting more than 25 pounds.
- Be sure your child gets plenty of rest.
- Plan for your child to be out of school or daycare for at least 1 week.

Diet

Your child may lose weight from eating less than normal. This is ok as long as they are drinking plenty of fluids.

Follow the “tonsillectomy diet” for one (1) week. This means:

- Begin with clear liquids such as: water, broth, apple juice, popsicles, Jell-o[®], Hi-C[®], and Kool-Aid[®]. Cold or lukewarm liquids may feel better. Frequent small sips are better than quickly drinking a large amount of fluid and then not drinking for the next few hours.
- Other foods that your child may like are pudding, ice cream, milkshakes, and cream soup.
- Your child may eat soft foods as soon as they feel able to. Soft foods include scrambled eggs, mashed potatoes, macaroni and cheese, cooked cereal, yogurt, and apple sauce.
- Some children eat solid foods earlier than others. Your child will eat solid foods when able to swallow better. It is normal if your child does not want to eat solid foods the first week. It is vital to drink plenty of liquids. Acidic or spicy foods (orange or grapefruit juice, tomatoes) may make your child’s throat more sore, but this won’t do any harm.
- **Do not** eat foods that are rough and crunchy for an entire week. They may scratch your child’s throat and cause bleeding. This includes:
 - popcorn
 - pretzels
 - potato chips, other chips
 - nuts
 - cold cereal

Follow-Up

Your child will not have a follow-up clinic visit unless there is a problem. You may call at any time with questions or concerns.

When to Call

- **Any bleeding**
- Nausea and vomiting that does not go away.
- A fever over 102°F.
- Pain not controlled with medicine.
- A feeling that your child is not recovering as they should. It takes about 7-10 days before they start to feel better.
- Dehydration. Your child should be urinating at least twice in 24 hours.

Who to Call

Pediatric Otolaryngology (ENT) Clinic
(608) 265-7760, weekdays from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm.

After clinic hours and weekends: Call **(608) 262-0486**. This will give you the paging operator. Ask for the ENT doctor on call. Give the operator your name and phone number with the area code. The doctor will call you back.

If outside the Madison area, call toll free:
1-800-323-8942.

If you are a patient receiving care at UnityPoint – Meriter, Swedish American or a health system outside of UW Health, please use the phone numbers provided in your discharge instructions for any questions or concerns.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person’s health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 6/2020. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#5422