

# Tonsillectomy

## Definition

**Tonsillectomy** is surgery to remove one or both **tonsils**. The tonsils are small, pink masses located at the back of your mouth in the throat, one on each side.

Tonsils are a part of the immune system, the body's defense against disease. However, sometimes the tonsils themselves become infected. This is a condition called **tonsillitis** and can cause problems such as:

- Fever.
- Breathing difficulty.
- Difficulty swallowing.
- Sleep apnea.
- Other infections.

When tonsillitis is a recurring problem or when tonsils become enlarged for other reasons, a tonsillectomy may be recommended as the best treatment.

## Treatment

A tonsillectomy is done in a hospital or outpatient clinic, often by an **otolaryngologist** (a doctor who specializes in problems of the ear, nose, and throat). There are several different ways that tonsils can be removed and you should ask your doctor for specific information regarding how your surgery will be performed.

The surgery is usually done while the patient is under **general anesthesia**. You will not be aware that the operation is taking place.

You will likely go home the same day as surgery if you can drink liquids once you are fully awake. Your doctor may require you to stay overnight if you cannot drink or if you are sick, feel excessive pain, or run a high fever.

## Complications

It is normal to experience the following problems for up to two weeks after surgery:

- Throat pain.
- Ear pain.
- Low-grade fever.
- Blood in your saliva.
- Eating difficulty.

These discomforts can be managed by medication, drinking plenty of fluids, and gradually introducing yourself to soft foods. During the healing period, you should be careful to:

- Take your medicine as directed.
- Avoid smoking.
- Drink enough to stay hydrated.
- Eat enough to be nourished.

Occasionally, patients experience a high fever or persistent bleeding. These problems may be serious. Call your doctor if your fever rises above 101° Fahrenheit or if bleeding suddenly becomes heavy and does not stop.

### **Prognosis**

Removing the tonsils typically has good results. In most people, the surgery very quickly reduces or eliminates the problems related to swollen or infected tonsils.

### **For More Information**

#### **American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery**

One Prince St., Alexandria, VA 22314-3357

Phone: (703) 836-4444

<http://www.entnet.org/healthinfo/index.cfm>