

Colorado Children's Ear Nose and Throat, P.C.

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Tonsil Removal (Tonsillectomy)

What is a tonsillectomy?

A tonsillectomy is a procedure in which the doctor removes your tonsils because of chronic infection or inflammation. The tonsils support the body's immune response to infections in the upper respiratory tract (such as colds). However, they can be removed without weakening the body's response to infection.

When is it used?

Reasons for doing this procedure include:

- an abscess (a buildup of pus) on the tonsils
- frequent tonsillitis (more than three serious infections of the tonsils a year) or the "strep carrier" state, where strep bacteria are living in the tonsils and capable of causing or spreading infection to others
- difficulty swallowing or breathing because of enlarged tonsils
- cancer of the tonsils.

An alternative is to choose not to have treatment, recognizing the risks of your condition. You should ask your doctor about these choices.

How do I prepare for a tonsillectomy?

Plan for your care and recovery after the operation. Allow for time to rest and try to find people to help you with your day-to-day duties.

Do not take aspirin for a week before the operation, unless advised otherwise by your doctor.

Follow any instructions your doctor may give you. Eat a light meal, such as soup or salad, the night before the procedure. Do not eat or drink anything after midnight and the morning before the procedure. Do not even drink coffee, tea, or water.

What happens during the procedure?

You will receive a general anesthetic. This drug will relax your muscles, keep you from feeling pain, and make you feel like you are in a deep sleep.

The doctor will use an instrument to keep your mouth open and expose the tonsils in the back of your throat. Then he or she will remove the tonsils from the surrounding tissues. The doctor may use stitches to help control any bleeding and will then remove the instrument that kept your mouth open.

What happens after the procedure?

You may go home later that day or stay in the hospital overnight and go home the next day, depending on your condition. You will be uncomfortable for about a week to 10 days. It will hurt to swallow. Spend this time at home and avoid all strenuous activity for at least 2 weeks.

Ask your doctor what other steps you should take and when you should come back for a checkup.

What are the benefits of this procedure?

You likely will no longer have repeated sore throats or ear infections. If there was cancer it should be removed.

What are the risks associated with this procedure?

- There are some risks when you have general anesthesia. Discuss these risks with your doctor.
- The major and most common risk is that as your throat heals and the scabs come off, your throat may bleed. If this happens, spit the blood into a cup to avoid swallowing it.
- You could have some numbness in your tongue from the instrument that kept your mouth open.
- You could become dehydrated if you are unable to swallow.
- Infection or bleeding could develop.
- If there was cancer, not all the cancer may be removed. The cancer may grow back.

You should ask your doctor how these risks apply to you.

When should I call the doctor?

Call the doctor immediately if:

- The bleeding continues for more than 10 to 15 minutes, (if this happens, spit the blood into a cup to avoid swallowing it).
- You develop a fever.
- You become dehydrated.

Call the doctor during office hours if:

- You have questions about the procedure or its result.
- You want to make another appointment.

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