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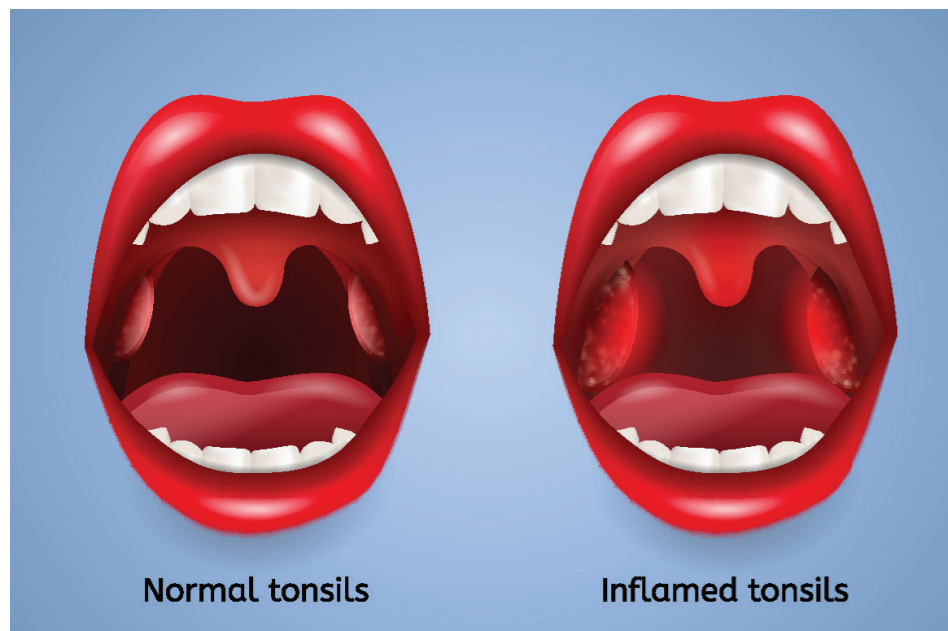
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## TONSILS AND ADENOIDS



Digital Version



### TONSILS AND ADENOIDS

This leaflet gives a brief overview of problems which may occur

### TONSILS

Tonsils are lumps of soft tissue and are part of the immune system. You have two tonsils, one on either side at the back of the mouth.

Tonsils vary in size from person to person.

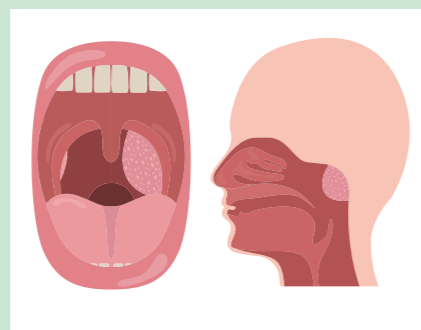
A main function of tonsils is to trap germs (bacteria and viruses) which you may breathe in. Proteins called antibodies produced by the immune cells in the tonsils help to kill germs and help to prevent throat and lung infections.

Like tonsils, adenoids help to defend the body from infection. They trap bacteria and viruses which you breathe in through your nose. They contain cells and antibodies of the immune system to help

prevent throat and lung infections.

You can normally see your tonsils by opening your mouth wide and looking in a mirror. They are the two fleshy lumps that you can see at the sides and back of the mouth.

### ADENOIDS



Adenoids are made of similar tissue and are part of the immune system. They

hang from the upper part of the back of the nasal cavity (see diagram).

Adenoids get bigger after you are born but usually stop growing between the ages of 5 and 15 years.

You cannot see your adenoids. If needed, a doctor can look at the adenoids either by using a light and a small mirror held at the back of the mouth, or by using a small flexible telescope. Occasionally, an X-ray is done to determine the size of the adenoids.

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The body has other means of preventing infection and fighting off bacteria and viruses. In fact, the adenoids tend to shrink after early childhood and by the teenage years they often almost disappear completely. Generally, you can have your tonsils and adenoids removed without increasing your risk of infection.

### TONSILLITIS

Tonsillitis is an infection of the tonsils. A sore throat is the common symptom. In addition, you may also have:

- A cough
- A headache
- Tiredness
- Swollen neck glands
- A high temperature (fever)
- Pain on swallowing
- A feeling of wanting to be sick (nausea)

Pus may appear as white spots on the enlarged tonsils. Symptoms typically get worse over 2-3 days and then gradually go, usually within a week. Most cases of tonsillitis are caused by viruses, some are caused by germs (bacteria).

### GLANDULAR FEVER (INFECTIOUS MONONUCLEOSIS)

Infectious mononucleosis is caused by the Epstein-Barr virus. It tends to cause a severe bout of tonsillitis in addition to other symptoms. See separate leaflet called Glandular Fever (Infectious Mononucleosis) for more details.

### QUINSY

This is also known as peritonsillar abscess. An abscess is a collection of pus. Quinsy is an uncommon condition where an abscess develops next to a tonsil, due to a bacterial infection. It usually develops just on one side. It may follow an episode of tonsillitis or may arise on its own. The tonsil on the affected side may be swollen or look normal. However, it is pushed towards the midline as pus forms and the abscess next to the tonsil gets bigger and bigger. Quinsy is very painful and can make you feel very unwell. It is treated with antibiotic medicines; however, the pus also often needs to be drained with a small operation.

### CANCER OF THE TONSIL

This is a rare cancer. It is more common in smokers and those who drink a lot of alcohol.

### DO I NEED MY TONSILS TAKEN OUT?



You may be advised to have your tonsils removed in certain situations. In particular:

- If you have frequent and severe bouts of tonsillitis. This usually means:
- Five or more episodes of tonsillitis in the preceding year; or
- Five or more such episodes in each of the preceding two years; or
- Three or more such episodes in each of the preceding three years; and
- The bouts of tonsillitis affect normal functioning.

For example, they are severe enough to make you need time off from work or from school. The adenoids may also be removed at the same time for this reason. Throat infections are not totally prevented if the tonsils are removed. However, there is a good chance that their number and severity will be reduced.

Also, the risk of developing quinsy is reduced. Many people say they generally feel better in themselves after having their tonsils removed if they previously had frequent bouts of tonsillitis.

- If you have large tonsils that are partially obstructing your airway, this may be a contributing factor to a condition called obstructive sleep apnoea syndrome.

### SOME PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH ADENOIDS

Swollen or enlarged adenoids are common in children. Causes include:

- Infections with germs (viruses or bacteria). Once an infection clears, the swelling often goes down but sometimes the adenoids remain enlarged.
- Allergies.
- Often there is no apparent cause.

### WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF SWOLLEN, ENLARGED ADENOIDS?

Swollen adenoids may not cause any symptoms or problems. However, symptoms may develop in some cases, especially if the adenoids become very large. Possible symptoms include the following:

- Breathing through the nose may be noisy or rattly. This may become worse and cause difficulty breathing through the nose. The child then mainly mouth breathes.
- A constantly runny nose.
- Snoring at night. In severe cases sleep may be disrupted by the blocked nose and there is difficulty with breathing.
- Swollen adenoids may block the entrance of the Eustachian tube. This is the tube that goes from the back of the nose to the middle ear. It normally allows air to get into the middle ear. If this tube is blocked it may contribute to the formation of glue ear (fluid in the middle ear). Pain & decrease hearing.

### WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR ENLARGED ADENOIDS?

In most cases no treatment is needed. Often the symptoms are mild but may flare up during a cold or throat infection. Adenoids normally gradually shrink in later childhood and usually almost disappear by the teenage years. So symptoms tend to clear with time.

If amount of difficulty is more or symptoms are severe then a doctor may consider removing the adenoids. For example, if a child regularly has difficulty sleeping or disrupted night-time sleep due to a blocked nose. Also, some children with glue ear may benefit from removal of their adenoids.