

TONSILLECTOMY & ADENOIDECTOMY (CHILDREN)

Patient and Family Information

What are tonsils and adenoids?

Tonsils are small, rounded pieces of tissue located at the back on each side of the throat. The adenoid is a clump of tissue located right behind the nose, above the roof of the mouth, and needs special instruments or an X-ray in order to see it.

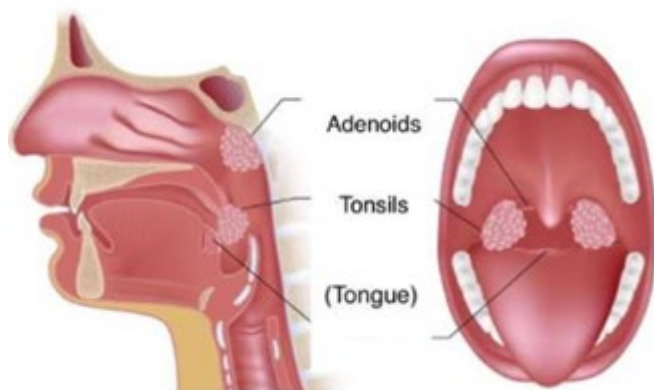


Image source: ENT kids adults

What are tonsils and adenoids for?

Tonsils and adenoids help to fight infections by forming antibodies to pathogens like viruses and bacteria that invade the nose or mouth. This function may be important in young children up to three years old, but there is no evidence to show that this is significant thereafter.

Studies have shown that children do not suffer any negative effects on their immune systems after the removal of tonsils/adenoids.

What is a tonsillectomy and adenoidectomy?

Tonsillectomy refers to the removal of tonsils from the back of the mouth.

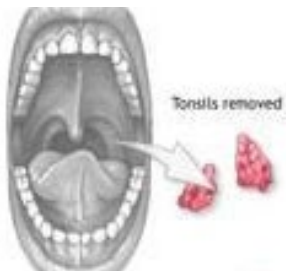


Image Source: A.D.A.M 2018

An adenoidectomy refers to the removal of lymphoid tissue from the back of the nose.

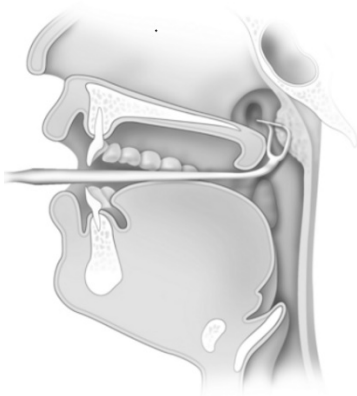


Image Source: Pocket dentistry

Why is this surgery required?

There are different reasons for undergoing a tonsillectomy and/or adenoidectomy.

- **Recurrent or chronic tonsillitis:**
This refers to frequent or prolonged episodes of tonsil infections.
- **Snoring/Obstructive sleep apnoea:**
Enlarged tonsils/adenoids can lead to the blockage of the airway and snoring during sleep. If left untreated, this may lead to complications involving growth and concentration in school.
- **Chronic sinusitis in children refractory to medical therapy:** This refers to persistent sinus infection that may be related to enlarged adenoids.
- **Glue ear (otitis media with effusion):**
This refers to the build-up of fluid behind the ear drum which affects hearing. Enlarged adenoids or chronic adenoiditis can contribute to that by affecting the Eustachian tube function.
- **Peritonsillar abscess:** This arises from pus formation around the tonsils.
- **Tumours:** These are rare occurrences in children but may be seen in conditions like lymphoma.

What does this surgery involve?

The surgery is performed under general anaesthesia, through the mouth. There will be no external incisions on the face. Your child will be required to fast overnight before the surgery.

Following the administration of general anaesthesia, a device is inserted to keep the mouth open. The tonsils are then removed using various methods, of which the most common is using an electrical instrument.

If adenoidectomy is performed, adenoids are scraped away using a curette or removed using an electrical instrument via the back of the throat to reach the back of the nose.

What must I look out for before surgery?

If your child has fever or cough, the surgery will need to be postponed until your child is well and fit.

What are the risks associated with this surgery?

There are potential complications associated with any surgery. This may pertain to the administration of general anaesthesia or the surgical procedure itself. You should speak to your doctor about these risks. Some potential complications include:

- Pain
- Bleeding (5%) — delayed bleeding may require readmission to the hospital and/or another operation to stop the bleeding.
- Infection
- Injury to the lips, gum, teeth, tongue or jaw
- Taste disturbance
- Injury to the Eustachian tube
- Leakage of fluids through the nose or nasal speech — this is usually temporary.

What are my alternative options?

Undergoing a tonsillectomy will prevent tonsil infections from recurring but will not prevent sore throats from other causes. You may opt for conservative management with antibiotics during each episode of infection.

Using topical medications such as nasal steroid spray may reduce nasal congestion. You may opt for conservative management as such before deciding on surgery.

What can I expect immediately after surgery?

Your child will be discharged on the day of the surgery if there are no other significant comorbidities.

He/She may experience sore throat and discomfort after the operation, and this may persist for a few days before improving. There may be slight blood stains in the saliva or secretions, and this is normal.

After surgery, it is important to eat and drink properly, as well as take the prescribed antibiotics and pain medications to help with the recovery. Doing otherwise may lead to an increased risk of complications, in particular infection and bleeding.

Dietary plans and restrictions after tonsillectomy

Patients should:

- **Increase fluid intake** such as water, juice, athletic drinks.
- **Take cold food** such as popsicles, ice-cream or sorbet. These are ideal as the coldness of the food may help to reduce pain and swelling.
- **Take soft food** such as porridge, soup and mashed potatoes so pain is reduced to the minimal when swallowing.

Patients should avoid:

- **Hot food** as it can cause pain for some patients. Allow the food to cool before serving where possible.
- **Hard food** such as potato chips and other crunchy items as these foods can cause pain when swallowing.
- **Citrus food or drinks** such as lemon/orange and lime juice may cause throat irritation.
- **Physical exercise** as this may result in aggravation of bleeding from the surgical wounds. Avoid doing physical exercise for two weeks after the surgery.

When do you consult your doctor?

- Severe pain of the throat or ears that is not relieved with medications.
- Significant bleeding from the throat or nose:
 - Fresh blood on vomiting
 - Excessive swallowing reflex
- Prolonged or abnormal symptoms

Should you have any pre or post operation queries, please call us at 6772 4551 or email us at ent_fc@nuhs.edu.sg.

For urgent medical attention, please walk into the clinic during operating hours (Monday to Friday, between 8.30am to 5.30pm) or visit the Emergency Department after clinic hours.

National University Hospital

5 Lower Kent Ridge Road, Singapore 119074

OneNUHS Hotline: (65) 6908 2222

OneNUHS General Enquiries: contactus@nuhs.edu.sg

OneNUHS Appointments: appointment@nuhs.edu.sg

www.nuh.com.sg

The information in this brochure is meant for educational purposes and should not be used as a substitute for medical diagnosis or treatment. Please seek your doctor's advice before starting any treatment, or if you have any questions related to your health, physical fitness or medical condition.

© 2026, National University Hospital (Singapore) Pte. Ltd. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or shared without prior permission from National University Hospital (Singapore) Pte. Ltd.