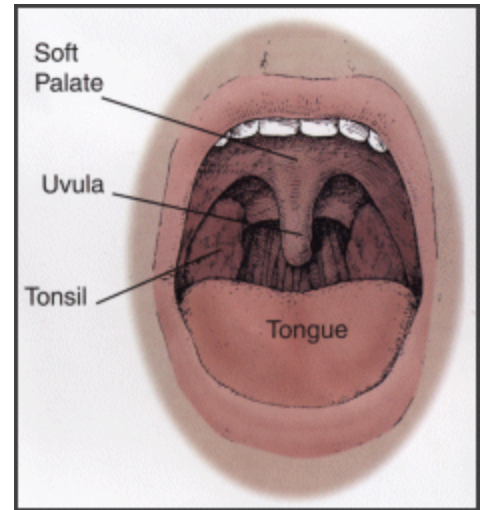


TONSILLITIS AND TONSILLECTOMY

What are the tonsils?

The tonsils are located in the back of the throat. They are part of a group of lymphoid tissue that collect bacteria and viruses that cause upper respiratory tract (nose and throat) infections. They also help to produce proteins (immunoglobulins) that help the body fight infections. Although the tonsils have a role in helping treat infection, the tonsils can become part of the infection as well. When this happens, removal of the tonsils will improve your child's health. Removal of the tonsils has not been shown to lead to an increase in infections or a loss of immune (disease fighting) function. This is because there are hundreds of other lymph nodes in the head and neck that perform the same function.



Where are the tonsils?

Actually, there are four areas of tonsil tissue located in the back of the throat. The tissue referred to as the "tonsils" is located on either side of the back of the mouth. The second area of tonsil tissue is located behind the nose, and is called the adenoids. The fourth area of tonsil tissue is located behind the tongue, called the lingual tonsils; it does not usually cause any difficulties and is rarely removed.

What is tonsillitis?

Tonsillitis is an infection of the tonsils. This infection usually involves the back of the throat as well (pharyngitis). This infection is uncommon in children less than one year old. It is seen most frequently in children four to seven years of age, and continues less frequently throughout late childhood and adult life.

What are some of the causes of tonsillitis?

In about 85% of cases, viruses are the most common cause of tonsillitis. The second most common cause is a bacteria known as Streptococcus (Group A Beta hemolytic Streptococcus), otherwise known as "strep throat". Other bacteria can cause tonsillitis, but much less frequently.

What are the symptoms of tonsillitis?

Tonsillitis usually results in a sore throat and difficulty swallowing. The throat visibly looks inflamed (red). In younger children, refusal to eat may be noted. Fever, headache, earache, and enlarged and tender glands in the neck may also be experienced.

How is tonsillitis treated?

It is important to have your primary care doctor determine if the cause of the infection is viral or bacterial.

Viral tonsillitis is primarily treated with bed rest, Tylenol (acetaminophen) for fever and pain relief, and lots of fluids. Antibiotics do not help treat this type of infection.

Streptococcal tonsillitis does require the use of antibiotics, primarily to help get rid of the infection quickly and prevent complications. Complications can include an infection in the bloodstream, heart problems, rash, and others.

What is tonsillar hypertrophy?

In most children, the tonsils enlarge normally during early childhood, when infections of the nose and throat are most common. They usually shrink as the child gets older and decrease in size in puberty. In some children, the tonsils continue to become larger and block a significant portion of the passage of air through the mouth. This can result in snoring, poor sleep, intermittent waking at night and even gasping for air called apnea. This can be discovered through the patient's history or through a sleep study.

How do you treat tonsillar hypertrophy?

Initial conservative measures are always tried first. Medications can help shrink the amount of tonsil and adenoid tissue. Whether it is effective enough to improve a child's symptoms depends on the individual patient. If conservative measures are not effective, it may be necessary to remove the tonsils surgically.

When is tonsillectomy (removal of the tonsils) a consideration?

Your doctor may send you to an ear nose and throat specialist to be evaluated for removal of the tonsils.

Some of the guidelines that we follow in order to consider an tonsillectomy are:

1. Chronic infection of the tonsils despite adequate treatment.
2. Tonsillar hypertrophy (enlargement) causing difficulty breathing, obstructive apnea (gasping) +/- excessive snoring, restless sleep and daytime sleepiness, or difficulty swallowing.

These are the most common indications for removing the tonsils. However, each child is evaluated based on their unique history.