

Surgery to remove your tonsils (tonsillectomy)

Ear, Nose & Throat

Information for Patients

Produced: April 2022

Review: April 2025

Leaflet number: 1290 Version: 1

What are tonsils?

Tonsils are small glands in the throat, one on each side. They are there to fight germs when you are a young child. As you get older the tonsils become less important in fighting germs and usually shrink.

Do you need them?

Your body can still fight germs without them. We only take them out if they are doing more harm than good.

Why take them out?

Surgery to remove your tonsils is called a tonsillectomy. We only take the tonsils out if:

- they cause recurrent tonsillitis (sore throat due to infected tonsils) despite treatment with antibiotics.
- if they are large and block the airway.
- an abscess develops alongside the tonsil as a result of tonsil infection. This is called a quinsy and is unpleasant. People who have had more than one quinsy often choose to have their tonsils removed to stop having another.
- we suspect there is a tumour in the tonsil. A rapid increase in the size of the tonsil, changes in appearance of the tonsil or bleeding may occur if a tumour of the tonsil develops. Tumours of the tonsil are rare.

**Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk

Do I have to have my tonsils out?

You will not always need to have your tonsils out. You may want to just wait and see if the tonsil problem gets better by itself. The doctor will explain to you why he or she feels that surgery is the best treatment.

You may change your mind about the operation at any time and signing a consent form does not mean that you have to have the operation.

If you would like to have a second opinion about the treatment you can ask your specialist. He or she will not mind arranging this for you. You may wish to ask your own GP to arrange a second opinion.

How do I prepare for the operation?

Arrange for 2 weeks off work to recover. Let us know if you get unwell or have tonsillitis before your admission date because it may be better to delay the operation. It is very important to tell us if you have any unusual bleeding or bruising problems, or if this type of problem might run in your family.

How is the operation done?

You will be asleep under general anaesthetic. We take the tonsils out through the mouth and then stop the bleeding. This takes about 30 minutes.

How long will I be in hospital?

Surgery may often be performed as a day case procedure, but sometimes if you live far from the hospital or have any conditions increasing the risks of bleeding you may be asked to stay overnight. Your surgeon will only let you go home when you are eating and drinking and feel well enough.

Are there any risks or possible complications?

Tonsil surgery is normally safe but every operation has a small risk:

- The most serious problem is bleeding. This may need a second operation to stop it but this is very rare.
- As a raw area is left where the tonsils are removed, bacteria can get in and cause infection. This is rare, and usually easily treated with antibiotics.
- There is a very small chance that we may chip or knock out a tooth, especially if it is loose, capped or crowned. Please let us know if you have any teeth like this.
- A change in taste after the operation. Although extremely rare, this can be permanent.

After the operation

- **Your throat will be sore:**

Your throat will be sore for about 10 days. It tends to get worse up to about 5 days after surgery, before getting better. It is important to take painkillers regularly, half an hour before meals for at least the first week. Do not take aspirin because it may make you bleed.

- **You may have sore ears:**

This is normal. It happens because your throat and ears have the same nerves. It does not mean that you have an ear infection.

- **Your throat will look white:**

This is normal while your throat heals. You may also see small threads in your throat, they are used to help stop the bleeding during the operation and they will fall out by themselves.

Some people get a throat infection after surgery. If this happens you may notice a fever, a bad smell from your throat and worsening pain. Call your GP or the hospital for advice if this happens.

- **Eat normal food:**

Eating food will help your throat to heal. It will help the pain too. Drink plenty of fluids and stick to bland, non-spicy food. Chewing gum may also help the pain.

- **You will need 10 to 14 days off work:**

Make sure you rest at home away from crowds and smoky places. Keep away from people with coughs and colds and wash your hands often to avoid catching a cold. You may feel tired for the first few days but this is normal and you should make sure that you rest.

- **Bleeding can be serious:**

If you notice any bleeding from your throat you must see a doctor. Call your GP, the ward or go to the nearest Emergency Department.

Contact details

Ear, Nose & Throat (ENT) Department, Leicester Royal Infirmary via switchboard 0300 303 1573

Further information

For further information, please visit ENTUK www.entuk.org

If you have any questions, write them down here to remind you what to ask when you speak to your nurse/ doctor/ consultant:

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔
على هذه المعلومات بلغةٍ أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل

જો તમને અન્ય ભાષામાં આ માહિતી જોઈતી હોય, તો નીચે આપેલ નંબર પર કૃપા કરી ટેલિફોન કરો

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।

Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

If you would like this information in another language or format such as EasyRead or Braille, please telephone 0116 250 2959 or email equality@uhl-tr.nhs.uk