

Tonsillectomy Post Operative Instructions

Nurse Line (8:30am to 5pm)
After Hours Doctor Line

937-496-0261
937-496-2600

Effects of Anesthesia

Tonsillectomy (with or without Adenoidectomy) involves a brief anesthesia, typically 20 - 60 minutes. Patients may be quite irritable for several hours after surgery. If sedatives were given, some patients will remain sleepy for much of the day. Nausea and vomiting is occasionally seen, and usually resolves by the evening of surgery - even without additional medications.

Medications

Tonsillectomy is a painful procedure. Pain medications help but do not completely alleviate the discomfort.

YOUNGER CHILDREN

- Younger children should be given Tylenol Elixir and Motrin Elixir, with dosing based on weight (see chart below). Start by giving scheduled Tylenol every 4 hours. If this does not control the pain, you can ALTERNATE between Tylenol and Motrin and give a dose every 3 hours (i.e. Tylenol given at 12pm, then Motrin at 3pm then Tylenol at 6pm). Many children do not like the taste of liquid medications, so you may substitute Tylenol and Motrin chewables for elixir prescribed. Below are the doses for both. It is fine to use generic store brands instead of brand name -- Walgreen's generic has a taste tolerated by most children. You do not need to wait for your child to complain of pain to give them medication, scheduled dosing of medications will control the pain more effectively.

OLDER CHILDREN

- Older children will be prescribed Lortab Elixir and can use Tylenol Elixir. You may use ONE OR THE OTHER every 4 hours (DO NOT give them at the same time). Try giving Tylenol (see chart below for dosing) scheduled every 4 hours. If the Tylenol Elixir does not help to relieve the pain at all, then substitute the Lortab Elixir for the next dose. Every time you give a dose of Lortab Elixir, do so with some food or full liquid to prevent nausea. The best thing to take with the medication is a cup of pudding or ice cream, a milkshake or cup of milk.

Child's weight (lbs)	Tylenol (Acetaminophen)			Motrin (Ibuprofen)		
	mg	Elixir (160mg/5mL)	Meltaways (160mg each)	mg	Elixir (100mg/5mL)	Chewables (100mg each)
20	130	4 mL	1/2	80	4 mL	1/2
30	200	6 mL	1	120	6 mL	1
40	270	8 mL	1 1/2	160	8 mL	1 1/2
50	330	10 mL	2	200	10 mL	2
60	400	12 mL	2 1/2	240	12 mL	2 1/2
70	470	14 mL	2 1/2	300	15 mL	3
80	540	16 mL	3	340	17 mL	3
90	600	18 mL	3 1/2	400	20 mL	4

ADULTS

- Adults will be prescribed a narcotic pain pill or elixir (Percocet, Norco, Vicodin, Lortab are some examples). Do not use aspirin products (Bayer's, Goode powders, Excedrin) - they may increase the chance of bleeding. Every time you take a dose of pain medication, do so with some food or full liquid to prevent nausea. The best thing to take with the medication is a cup of pudding or ice cream, a milkshake or cup of milk.

Activity

Vigorous exercise should be avoided for 14 days after surgery. This risk of bleeding is increased with increased activity and bleeding from where the tonsils were removed can happen for up to 2 weeks after surgery. Baths and showers are fine. Many patients have reduced energy levels until their pain decreases and they are taking in more nourishment and calories. You should not travel out of the local area for a full 2 weeks after surgery in case you experience bleeding

after surgery.

Eating & Drinking

Dehydration is the biggest enemy in the recovery period. It will increase the pain, increase the risk of bleeding and delay the healing. It usually happens because the pain of swallowing keeps the patient from drinking enough liquids. Therefore, the key is to force fluids, and that works best when pain control is maximized. You cannot drink too much after having a tonsillectomy. The only drinks to avoid are citrus like orange and grapefruit juices because they will burn the back of the throat. Incentive charts with prizes work very well to get young children to drink fluids and take their medications after surgery. Some patients will have a small amount of liquid come out of their nose when they drink after surgery, this should stop within a few weeks after surgery.

Although drinking is more important, eating is fine even on the day of surgery but avoid foods that are crunchy or have sharp edges. Dairy products may be taken, if desired. You should avoid acidic, salty and spicy foods (especially tomato sauces). Chewing gum or bubble gum encourages swallowing and saliva flow, and may even speed up the healing. Almost everyone loses some weight after tonsillectomy (which is usually regained in the 2nd or 3rd week after surgery). Drinking is far more important than eating in the first 14 days after surgery, so concentrate on that first and foremost. Adequate liquid intake probably speeds recovery.

Other things...

- Pain is usually the worst in the morning; this can be avoided by overnight medication administration if needed.
- Since moisture helps soothe the healing throat, a room humidifier (hot or cold) is suggested when the patient is sleeping.
- Some patients feel pain relief with an ice collar to the neck (or a bag of frozen peas or corn). Be careful to avoid placing cold plastic directly on the skin - wrap in a paper towel or washcloth.
- If the tonsils and adenoids are very large, the patient's voice may change after surgery.

- The recovery from tonsillectomy is a very painful period, often the worst pain people can recall, so please be understanding and patient with yourself, or the patient you are caring for. It is helpful to take pain medicine during the night if the patient awakens-- the worst pain is usually in the morning. **The pain will increase for the first week after surgery.** Please be aware that no combination of medicines will completely eliminate the pain – the patient will need to continue eating/drinking in spite of the remaining discomfort.
- You should not travel outside of the local area for 14 days after surgery in case significant bleeding occurs.

What should we expect after surgery?

As previously mentioned, most patients have a significant amount of pain after tonsillectomy, with pain resolving 7-14 days after surgery. Older children and adults seem to have more discomfort. Most patients can go home the day of surgery.

- **Ear pain:** Many people will complain of earaches after tonsillectomy. This is caused by referred pain coming from throat and not the ears. Give pain medications and encourage liquid intake.
- **Fever:** Many patients have a low-grade fever after tonsillectomy - up to 101.5 degrees (38^o C.) for several days. Higher prolonged fever should be reported to your surgeon.
- **Bad looking (and bad smelling) throat:** After surgery, the place where the tonsils were removed is covered with a white film, which is a moist scab. This usually develops 3-5 days after surgery and falls off 10-14 days after surgery and usually causes bad breath. There will be some redness and swelling as well. The uvula (the part of the throat that hangs down in the middle between the tonsils) is usually swollen for several days after surgery.
- **Sore/bruised feeling of Tongue:** This is common for the first few days after surgery because the tongue is pushed out of the way to take out the tonsils in surgery.

When should we call the doctor?

● **Nausea/Vomiting:** This is a common side effect from General Anesthesia and can last up to 24-36 hours after surgery. Try giving sips of clear liquids like Sprite, water or apple juice then gradually increase fluid intake. If the nausea or vomiting continues beyond this time frame, call the doctor's office for medications that will help relieve the nausea and vomiting.

● **Bleeding:** Significant bleeding is rare, but it happens to about 5% of patients who have tonsillectomy. It may come from the nose, the mouth, or be vomited or coughed up. Ice water mouthwashes may help stop or reduce bleeding. If you have bleeding that does not stop, you should call the office (during business hours) or the on call physician (evenings, weekends) or go to the emergency room if you are very concerned.

● **Dehydration:** If there has been little or no liquids intake for 24 hours, the patient may need to come to the hospital for IV fluids. Signs of dehydration include lethargy, the lack of tears when crying, and reduced or very concentrated urine output.

● **High Fever:** If the patient has a consistent temperatures greater than 102⁰, or when accompanied by cough or difficulty breathing, you should call the doctor's office.

● **If you run out of pain medication:** Some patients run out of pain medications prescribed after surgery. If you need more, call the office DURING BUSINESS HOURS and more will be prescribed. Keep an eye on your prescription so that you don't run out completely before you can pick up more, especially before the weekend.