Royal National Throat, Nose and Ear Hospital

Tonsil surgery for adults

Ear, Nose and Throat Surgery
What are tonsils?
Tonsils are small glands on either side of the throat. They fight germs.

Do I 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?
We only take your tonsils out if you suffer from frequent, severe, sore throats.

Do I have to have my tonsils out?
No - you may want to just wait and see if your tonsil problem gets better by itself. Only you can decide if your sore throats are so much of a problem that you want surgery.

Before your operation
Arrange for a couple of weeks off work. Let us know if you have a sore throat or cold in the week before the operation - it may be safer to postpone your surgery.

We may ask you to attend the pre-assessment clinic, either on the day of your outpatient clinic appointment or following a telephone health questionnaire. This is to ensure that you are fit for your surgery.
Asking for your consent
We want to involve you in all the decisions about your care and treatment. If you decide to go ahead with treatment, by law we must ask for your consent and will ask you to sign a consent form. This confirms that you agree to have the procedure and understand what it involves. Staff will explain all the risks, benefits and alternatives before they ask you to sign a consent form. If you are unsure about any aspect of your proposed treatment, please don’t hesitate to speak with a senior member of staff again.

How is the operation done?
You will be asleep under general anaesthetic. We cut the tonsils and take them out through your mouth. You are in the operating department for about an hour.

How long will I be in hospital?
You will go home on the same day (as long as the operation is straightforward and we think that their general state of health and home circumstances are suitable).
Can there be problems?

Tonsil surgery is very safe, but every operation has a small risk. Please discuss this with your doctor when you visit the hospital. The most common problems are:

- During the operation, 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.

- Some people feel sick after the operation. This settles quickly.

- Some people get an infection in their throat and need to see their GP. This may be the case if you have a sudden increase in pain, have a fever or fresh bleeding from your throat.

- The most serious problem is bleeding. This may need a second operation to stop it. About one adult in every ten who has had their tonsils out will need to come back into hospital because of not eating or bleeding, however only one out of every 50 will need a second operation.

- Variant Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease (vCJD) is a very rare illness affecting the brain. There is a theoretical risk that instruments used in tonsillectomy could spread the disease. This is very rare (about 1 in 100,000 operations).
After the operation:

Your throat will be sore
Your throat will remain sore for about ten days and may be worse four to five days after the operation this is normal and occurs as the throat heals. Take painkillers (e.g. paracetamol, ibuprofen) regularly, half an hour before meals for the first few days. Do not take more than it says on the label. Do not take aspirin painkillers (e.g. anadin) they can make you bleed.

Eat normal food
You do not have to eat soft food only. Eating normal food will help your throat heal and will help the pain. Chewing gum will also help the pain.

Your throat will look white
This is normal while your throat heals; your breath may also smell.

You may have sore ears
This is normal. It happens because your throat and ears have the same nerve supply. It does not mean that you have an ear infection.

Stay off work for 14 days
Stay at home away from crowds and smoky places, and avoid strenuous exercise. Keep away from people with coughs and colds. Ask your nurse if you need a sick note. You may also feel tired for the first few days.
Contact details
B Ward: 020 3456 5029
C Ward: 020 3456 5027

Where can I get more information?
NHS Direct
Telephone: 0845 4647
Website: www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

University College London Hospitals
235 Euston Road, London. NW1 2BU
Switchboard: 0845 155 5000
Website: www.uclh.nhs.uk

UCLH cannot accept responsibility for information provided by external organisations.

PALS - If you have any concerns
PALS is a patient-friendly, easy to access service designed to provide a personal contact point to assist patients, relatives and carers. If you have a problem that you have not been able to sort out we can help you to resolve it. PALS are open 10:00 till 16:00 Monday to Friday.

Telephone: 020 3447 3042
Email: pals@uclh.nhs.uk
How to get here

The hospital is near King’s Cross Station. You are advised to travel by public transport due to no parking at the hospital. Pay and display parking may be available nearby.

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of the document, please contact us on 020 3456 5305. We will try our best to meet your needs.