

Patient information factsheet

Discharge advice following tonsillectomy

Definition

A tonsillectomy is an operation to remove the tonsils. These are glands found at the sides and towards the back of the throat, and which help to fight infection.

Why do they need to be removed?

The most common reasons are:

- frequent or repeated attacks of tonsillitis
- repeated abscesses on the tonsil (quinsy)
- sleep apnoea (condition in which breathing stops momentarily during sleep).

What does the operation consist of?

- The operation is performed under a short general anaesthetic. The surgeon removes the tonsils and stops any bleeding.
- You will wake up in the recovery area of the operating department, where nurses will closely monitor your condition and give you medication for any pain or sickness. You may have a drip (intravenous fluids) to hydrate you.

What happens upon return to the ward?

- You will be advised to rest in bed as you may feel sleepy due to the effects of the anaesthetic. We advise you to stay on the ward on the day of surgery.
- Nursing staff will continue to monitor your condition and administer medication should you need it.
- You will be encouraged to start taking oral fluids (water at first), and build up to a light diet as soon as possible. This is very important as the action of swallowing and chewing textured foods relieves pain, cleanses the tonsil beds and so helps to prevent infection. Regular pain relief will help make this easier.

Discharge advice

- Following this advice is very important in order to make a good recovery, minimise pain and prevent post-operative infection.
- Rest for two weeks at home. Avoid strenuous activity and operating heavy machinery during this time. If you need a sick certificate, please ask the medical staff before you leave.
- Do not be alarmed at the appearance of your throat, which may look white or grey. This is due to surgery and is part of the healing process.
- Pain or discomfort can last for about two weeks and tends to be worse in the morning. It is often at its worst between the fourth and eighth day after your operation, because this is when a membrane loosens off the tonsil beds. Earache is common as the nerve supply to the tonsils and the ears are connected. You will be given pain relief to take home and this should be taken regularly, particularly half an hour before you intend to eat a meal. Staff will explain how and when any prescribed medications should be taken.
- It is vital to eat and drink a normal diet, consisting of textured (rough or crunchy) foods and plenty of fluids (two to three litres per day).
- Avoid alcohol and spicy, very hot or acidic foods and fluids for several days.

- Stop or cut down smoking. Smoking affects the body's ability to heal. It will irritate the raw areas at the back of your throat and may lead to infection. Staff can provide you with advice, aids (e.g., nicotine patches) and support group contacts to help you quit.
- Avoid crowded or dusty places and people with coughs or colds
- If you experience any bleeding from the throat, contact f5 ward (day or night) for advice immediately or go straight to your nearest emergency department. Any bleeding is usually a sign of infection and will require urgent assessment and treatment.

Contact information

F5 ward: 023 8120 6511
 023 8120 4644

NHS 111: 111

If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or audio, please call 023 8120 4688 for help.