

Tonsillectomy

**Day Surgery Unit
Surgical Short Stay Unit**



Patient information leaflet

What are tonsils?

The tonsils are two oval lumps of tissue that sit at the back of the throat, behind the tongue. They are made of tissue specially designed to help fight infection. However, they are not essential to health as this type of tissue is found in many other areas of the body.

The tonsils can become infected with bacteria or viruses, making them swollen and painful; this is known as tonsillitis.

What is a tonsillectomy?

The tonsils are removed either by cutting, shaving and stitching with dissolving stitches, diathermy (removing and cauterising tissue using heat). The procedure is performed under general anaesthetic.

Why do I need a tonsillectomy?

Surgery is normally recommended for adults and children who have had repeated bouts of tonsillitis with symptoms that affect daily life (e.g. frequently requiring days off work or school), or if large tonsils are causing airway obstruction.

What are the alternatives?

Tonsillitis can be treated with antibiotics, either by short courses to treat individual infections, or by long-term low doses to prevent infections. However, as many bouts of tonsillitis are caused by viruses, antibiotics are not always effective.

Surgically removing the tonsils is the only effective way of preventing further infections.

However, as the procedure carries its own risks, particularly in adulthood, it will only be considered if the infections cannot be managed satisfactorily by other methods i.e. antibiotics.

What are the potential risks and complications?

Possible complications of this procedure include:

- **Bleeding** – see the section on bleeding inside this leaflet.
- **Infection** – if you experience a nasty taste at the back of your throat, increasing pain, or are otherwise concerned, contact the Unit, Clandon Ward (01483 464067) or see your own GP for advice.
- Damage to teeth.
- Altered taste.

After the operation

Will it hurt?

After the procedure it is common to have a very sore throat, and aching around the ears and jaw. The Unit will provide you with painkillers as necessary to control this discomfort. You will also be provided with painkillers to take home; please take these regularly, as advised by nursing staff, for several days. The pain may get worse 5-7 days after surgery, and may continue for up to 10 days.

Any medication to take home will carry a prescription charge, unless an overnight stay in hospital is required. Please tell nursing staff if you are exempt from prescription charges.

When can I eat and drink?

You may experience nausea and vomiting after your anaesthetic. This may be a side effect of the anaesthetic itself, or due to blood swallowed during the procedure. Medication can be provided to keep these symptoms to a minimum.

You will be encouraged to eat and drink as soon as possible after your procedure. A soft diet may be soothing, but more solid foods such as toast and apples will also be encouraged as chewing these aids healing. It is important to drink plenty of fluids, particularly after meals, and also to brush your teeth after meals to help prevent infection.

Will there be any bleeding?

Tonsillectomy carries a risk of bleeding. It is not uncommon for there to be a small amount of blood that is produced. Medical help should be sought if this is persistent, or if you have any concerns. This may occur:

- **During the operation.** This will be dealt with immediately by the surgeons.
- **Within 24 hours of surgery.** If bleeding occurs after discharge from hospital, return to A&E as soon as possible for treatment. Occasionally this type of bleeding necessitates returning to the operating theatre to stop the bleeding.
- **At around 7-10 days after the procedure.** If you experience bleeding, contact Clandon Ward as soon as possible (see 'in an emergency' on the back of this leaflet), or attend the A&E department. This type of bleeding can usually be controlled without the need for another operation.

Bleeding can be prevented once you get home by sticking to a normal diet, avoiding hot baths or showers and avoiding any strenuous activity for about two weeks.

When can I resume work/activity?

It is advisable to take 10-14 days off work, especially if your job is manual or involves contact with several people. Ask the nurses for a certificate to cover time of work if required.

Avoid contact with anyone who has a cold, cough or other infection. Avoid smoky, crowded atmospheres, and **do not smoke** yourself, for two weeks following the procedure. You will be particularly susceptible to infection and cigarette smoke heightens this risk.

When can I drive?

You must not drive for at least 48 hours following a general anaesthetic. You may resume driving when you feel able, this may take several days.

Follow-up appointment

If you require a follow-up appointment at the hospital, it will be forwarded to you by post.

Who do I contact in an emergency?

If you require urgent medical advice or attention, telephone Clendon Ward on **01483 464067** for advice, or attend the A&E Department.

Reference source

- NHS Choices
www.nhs.uk

Any complaints or comments?

If you have any complaints or comments, please contact the Doctors or Nurses straight away. If this does not solve the problem please contact the Day Surgery Unit Manager on **01483 406732** or write to the:

Day Surgery Unit
Royal Surrey County Hospital
Egerton Road
Guildford
Surrey
GU2 7XX

Similarly if you have any other comments about the service provided, we would also like to hear from you.

These notes will not cover everything. If you want to know more, please ask.

Contact details

If you require further advice, please do not hesitate to contact:

Day Surgery Unit

Telephone: 01483 406783, Mon–Fri, 8am–6pm

Surgical Short Stay Unit

Telephone: 01483 406828

Pre-assessment Clinic

Telephone: 01483 464152

Out of hours advice

Call 111 (formerly NHS Direct)

www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

PALS and Advocacy contact details

Contact details of independent advocacy services can be provided by our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who are located on the right hand side as you enter the main reception area. PALS are also your first point of contact for health related issues, questions or concerns surrounding RSCH patient services.

Telephone: 01483 402757

Email: rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net

Opening hours: 9.00am–3.00pm, Monday to Friday

If you would like information documents in large print, on tape or in another language or form please contact PALS.

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