

Useful telephone numbers

- ENT Department, Lister Hospital
☎ 01438 314333, Ext. 5113 / 4118
- ENT Admission Office (waiting list)
☎ 01438 286836 or 01438 286835
- ENT Nurse Specialist (Monday to Friday, 9am - 5pm)
☎ 01438 314333, bleep 1028
Mobile: 0778 534 3359 or 0787 639 0290

In an emergency, dial 999 and request an ambulance or attend your nearest Emergency Department.

NHS 111 can help if you have an urgent medical problem and you're not sure what to do. It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

☎ 111

Useful ENT website: www.entuk.org

Date of publication: April 2014
Author: ENT Clinical Nurse Specialist Team
Reference: ENT037 Version: 06 (June 2020)
Review Date: June 2023
© East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust

www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk

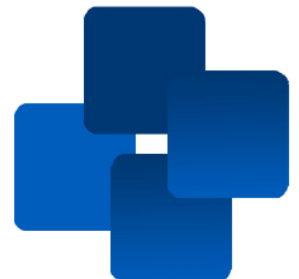
You can request this information in a different format or another language.

Patient Information

Tonsillectomy

(Adults)

Ears, Nose and Throat Department



What is a tonsillectomy?

Surgical removal of the tonsils is known as tonsillectomy.

The tonsils are lymphoid tissue, similar to the lymph nodes (or glands) found in the neck, groin and armpits. The tonsils are the two masses at the back of the throat and play a part in the development of immunity to infection.

When a patient has tonsillitis, they complain of severe sore throat and have a temperature and swollen glands in the neck. The patient is usually too unwell to go to work. Tonsillitis is common and is often treated with antibiotics. Sometimes the tonsils become persistently infected and patients suffer from frequent attacks of tonsillitis over a period of time (recurrent tonsillitis). The tonsils become very large so may affect the breathing and may cause snoring.

What are the benefits of a tonsillectomy?

To prevent recurrent tonsillitis/sore throat.

What are the alternatives, including no treatment?

You will not always need to have your tonsils out. You may want to wait and see if the tonsil problem gets better by itself. The doctor or nurse specialist should explain to you why he/she feels that the surgery is the best treatment. You may change your mind about the operation at any time. If you would like to have a second opinion about the treatment, you can ask your specialist who can arrange this or you can get in touch with your GP.

How is the procedure performed?

The operation to remove the tonsils is carried out by dissecting the tonsil from the muscle bed of the wall of the throat. This may be done with electric or steel instruments. Bleeding is controlled with silk thread, ties or with coagulation using heat.

Length of operation - The operation takes between 20-40 minutes.

Anaesthetic

During general anaesthesia, the anaesthetist will, with the aid of the anaesthetic drug, keep you in a state of unconsciousness.

Risks and complications

Risks of anaesthesia largely depend on the overall health, the nature of the operation and its seriousness. Minor complications can include some soreness or bruising at the site of the injection in the arm or

hand. Some patients experience a sore throat if a tube has been inserted into the windpipe to assist breathing. On rare occasions this may damage teeth. Some of the drugs used can cause muscle pains and some patients may feel sick or nauseous.

General complications of surgery

Bleeding is normally controlled at the time of surgery. Occasionally, bleeding can occur within the first 24 hours and may require further surgery. There is a risk of bleeding up to 7-14 days after the operation. If this happens it is because of an infection which will usually respond to antibiotics, but if the bleeding persists, further surgery may be needed.

Infection occurs in 3% of cases. A raised temperature in the first 24 hours is rarely due to infection. A persistent raised temperature may be due to an infection at the site of surgery or due to chest or urinary infections.

Pain - Painkillers should be taken regularly to lessen the discomfort.

Blood transfusion - Blood transfusions are rarely necessary unless severe bleeding occurs after the operation.

What happens after the procedure?

The operation is commonly performed as a day case or one night stay in hospital. Either way, we will only let you go home when you are eating and drinking and feel well enough.

It is very important to resume a normal diet starting the day after the operation and drink plenty of water. Chewing and swallowing increases salivary flows, reduces spasm of pharyngeal muscles and removes debris from tonsil beds; this will also relieve discomfort and reduce the risk of infection. Avoid smoking and alcohol for two weeks.

Time off work - 10-14 days off work.

Post-operative care and advice

Remain indoors during the first week; avoid contact with people with infections; avoid exposure to dust and smoky places.

If there is profuse bleeding, report immediately to the nearest Emergency Department.