

# Tonsillectomy (removal of the tonsils)

## Information for parents and/or caregivers

---

Welcome to the Southern Adelaide Health Network. This information sheet is designed to answer any questions you may have about your child having tonsillectomy and adenoidectomy.

Tonsillectomy (removal of the tonsils) and adenoidectomy (removal of the adenoids) are two different operations which are often needed at the same time because they can cause:

- Problems with breathing and sleeping usually at night if the tonsils or adenoids are big
- Difficulty swallowing if the tonsils are big
- Frequent infection or abscess of the tonsils

### Length of hospital stay

Your child will stay in hospital for one night and go home the next morning if well. Nurses will aim to have your child ready for discharge between 7am and 9am. Before your child goes home in the morning, they must have had something to eat and drink at breakfast time. If your family lives in the country, please ask your child's surgeon how long your child will need to stay near Adelaide after leaving the hospital.

### Children over 4 years old

If the operation was in the morning and the child is well 6 hours post-op and you:

- live within 15kms of FMC, you may be able to be discharged later in the afternoon on the day of surgery.
- Patient must have a telephone and access to a car at home.
- Please ask your nurse to check with the surgeon prior to going home.

### Goals for discharge

(child or caregiver to tick once complete)

- I can get out of bed and walk around the ward without feeling dizzy
- I can eat and drink without feeling "sick"
- I have no bleeding from my mouth or nose
- My pain is managed with medicine I can take at home
- I know who to contact if I have any problems or concerns
- I have someone to take me home in the morning

### Eating and Drinking

Children need to be encouraged to drink lots of fluid for the next 10 days to prevent dehydration. Your child should eat a normal diet it is best to avoid spicy foods, anything that is acidic (such as oranges and tomatoes). Soft foods are allowed but 'rougher' foods help remove 'slough' away from where the tonsils were and may prevent infection. School age children may chew gum between meals as this can help with swallowing.

### Nausea and vomiting

Do not worry if your child vomits once or twice after leaving hospital. If they vomit or feel sick, stop giving food for about an hour, then try a small amount of food like toast. Give more as your child can manage without feeling sick. If your child keeps vomiting, please seek help by either calling your child's surgeon, G.P or your nearest emergency department

## Bleeding

There is a risk of bleeding in the first week, and for up to two weeks after the operation. Return to the Emergency Department immediately if your child has signs of large amounts of bleeding such as:

- Vomiting or spitting 100mls or ½ cup fresh blood
- Minor streak of blood when spitting does not need to return to ED immediately; can safely monitor from home

## Mouth care

Your child may have bad breath for a few days. They should clean their teeth as normal. Yellow or grey 'slough' on the tonsil bed at the back of the throat is normal and will go away in 1-2 weeks.

## Activity

Your child should rest for a few days and will need to stay home from school or childcare for one to two weeks. During this time your child should avoid:

- rough play and sporting activities including swimming
- plane travel

## Pain relief

Having tonsils taken out can be very painful. Medicines to treat discomfort will be needed for at least 7 to 10 days. Pain medicines work better when given all the time rather than waiting for your child's pain to get worse. As your child gets better and their body heals, they will need less pain medicine and it can be given when needed. If your child does not like the taste of the pain medicine, you may try another brand with a different flavour that your child likes. The dose for their weight is on the label on the bottle.

All children should be given both paracetamol and ibuprofen regularly:

- Paracetamol for at least six days after their operation, four times a day (e.g., 7am, 12pm, 5pm and 10pm)

- Ibuprofen for four days after their operation three times a day (e.g., 8am, 2pm and 10pm). In rare cases, there might be a medical reason that your child does not receive ibuprofen.

Some children may have stronger pain medicines recommended. Special care must be taken with these medicines. Medicines containing codeine or aspirin must not be given to any child after a tonsil operation as they can have serious side effects. Please check with your doctor or pharmacist if you are unsure if a medicine contains codeine or aspirin.

**Stop giving strong pain medicines and contact the emergency department of your nearest hospital if your child is very sleepy or having trouble staying awake**

## Who do I contact for help?

If your child has any of the following problems or you have any concerns after your child's discharge, please telephone your local GP or the Flinders Medical Centre on 82045511 and ask to speak to a member of the ENT team.

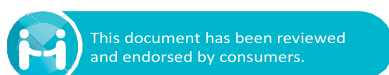
- Vomiting with or without fresh blood
- Worse throat / ear pain not relieved by regular pain medicine
- 'Flat' or 'sick' looking
- Dehydration with signs such as dry mouth, dark urine, sunken eyes, dry or loose skin
- A temperature greater than 38°C degree

**In an emergency call an ambulance or take your child to the nearest doctor or hospital**

## For more information

Womens and Childrens Division  
Flinders Medical Centre  
Flinders Drive, Bedford Park, South Australia 5042  
Telephone: 08 8204 5511  
[www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/fmc](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/fmc)

© Department for Health and Wellbeing, Government of South Australia.  
Reviewed August 2024. Next review August 2027.



**Health**  
Southern Adelaide  
Local Health Network