



## DECISION AID

### Tonsillitis in children: Is surgery necessary?

Your child has tonsillitis several times a year.

Tonsillitis can lead to a sore throat, fever and difficulty swallowing. Complications such as middle ear infections or infections that spread to nearby tissue are very rare. But the symptoms can be unpleasant, and your child is often ill.

A doctor may have recommended tonsil surgery in order to prevent your child from getting tonsillitis so often. Surgery isn't always necessary, though.

The aim of this decision aid is to help you choose a suitable treatment together with your doctors.

#### THESE ARE THE TREATMENT OPTIONS:

- Wait and see whether your child stops getting tonsillitis so often
- Surgery to completely remove the tonsils (total tonsillectomy)
- Surgery to partially remove the tonsils (partial tonsillectomy, or tonsillotomy)

#### PERSONAL DECISION

This short decision aid probably won't include all of the information that you need. You will still need to talk to a doctor, but the decision aid can help you. Your treatment decision will depend on various things, including

- how bad your child's symptoms are,
- how often they have tonsillitis,
- the likelihood of surgery helping, and
- whether your child has other medical conditions too.

The decision will also be influenced by the surgical technique used and whether or not the child will have to stay in the hospital.

**IMPORTANT:** Don't let anyone pressure you into choosing a certain treatment! Take the time to gather information and make a decision.

## PROS AND CONS OF THE TREATMENTS

	“Wait-and-see” approach	Total tonsillectomy	Partial tonsillectomy
<b>What does the treatment involve?</b>	You wait and see whether your child starts having tonsillitis less often. Acute symptoms can be treated with painkillers or – if the infection is caused by bacteria – with antibiotics.	The tonsils are <b>removed completely</b> . The child is given a general anesthetic beforehand. The operation is performed in a hospital.	The tonsils are only <b>partially removed</b> . The child is given a general anesthetic beforehand. The operation can be done as a day procedure (no hospital stay).
<b>Does it help?</b>	Tonsillitis problems often get better over time. The children then stop getting tonsillitis or get it less often.	You can still get sore throats even though the tonsils have been removed. Research has shown that people have fewer sore throats and take fewer sick days in the months following the operation. There is currently no research on the long-term benefits of tonsil surgery.	There isn't enough research to say how well partially removing the tonsils helps to prevent tonsillitis.
<b>What are the possible disadvantages?</b>	The child may keep on getting tonsillitis. But the “wait-and-see” approach generally doesn't lead to complications. It's still a good idea to see a doctor if the child has severe tonsillitis or a severe middle ear infection, though.	General risks associated with surgery. Temporary pain and trouble swallowing may occur after the surgery. About 5 out of 100 children have bleeding after surgery and may need to have another operation.	General risks associated with surgery. Temporary pain and trouble swallowing may occur after the surgery. The risk of bleeding after surgery is probably lower than if the tonsils are removed completely.
<b>Who is the treatment suitable for?</b>	For most children with recurrent tonsillitis.	For children who have bacterial tonsillitis at least 3 to 5 times per year.	For children who have bacterial tonsillitis at least 3 to 5 times per year.

## HELP WITH YOUR DECISION

You may still be unsure about which treatment you would prefer. You can write down your thoughts and questions on the following two pages.

Which treatment would I consider?		What do I like about it?	What don't I like about it?
<b>“Wait-and-see” approach / No treatment</b>	<input type="radio"/>		
<b>Complete removal of the tonsils</b>	<input type="radio"/>		
<b>Partial removal of the tonsils</b>	<input type="radio"/>		

### If you still aren't sure: What else do you need in order to make a decision?

With all the different pros and cons to consider, it can be hard to choose a treatment. But it is often possible to wait for a while at first. If your child doesn't start having tonsillitis less often and their symptoms don't improve, you can still consider surgery then.

If you need more help:

- You will find links to further information on the next page.
- You can talk to your doctor again.
- You can also talk to a different doctor. You will find information about this option on the next page, too.
- You can talk about it with your friends and family.



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**You will find in-depth information about the following topics on the internet:**

- Tonsillitis and the treatment options:  
[www.informedhealth.org/tonsillitis](http://www.informedhealth.org/tonsillitis)
- Detailed information on second medical opinions:  
[www.informedhealth.org/SecondOpinion](http://www.informedhealth.org/SecondOpinion)

#### **Preparing for the doctor's appointment**

Do you still have any questions? What are you most concerned about? Write down any questions or thoughts you may have, and take this decision aid with you to the appointment. You can ask the doctor about anything you would like to know or discuss anything you are worried about.

You will find a list of questions – and can choose those that are most important to you – here:

- [www.informedhealth.org/questions](http://www.informedhealth.org/questions)

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#### **Publishing details**

This decision aid was developed by the Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG, Germany). You will find information about our work and the sources we use here:

- [www.informedhealth.org/our-approach](http://www.informedhealth.org/our-approach)

Last updated: 12/2022