



DECISION AID

Tonsillitis in adults: Is surgery necessary?

You get tonsillitis several times a year and have probably taken antibiotics quite a few times because of it. The tonsillitis keeps causing symptoms like a sore throat, fever and difficulty swallowing, and you often have to take sick days as a result. But complications such as infections that spread to nearby tissue are very rare.

Your doctor may have recommended tonsil surgery in order to prevent you 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 you stop 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 symptoms are,
- how often you have tonsillitis,
- the likelihood of surgery helping, and
- whether you have other medical conditions too.

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

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

PROS AND CONS OF THE TREATMENTS

	“Wait-and-see” approach	Total tonsillectomy	Partial tonsillectomy
What does the treatment involve?	You wait and see whether you start having tonsillitis less often. Acute symptoms can be treated with painkillers or – if the infection is caused by bacteria – with antibiotics.	The tonsils are removed completely . You are given a general anesthetic beforehand. The operation is performed in a hospital.	The tonsils are only partially removed . You will usually be given a general anesthetic beforehand. The operation is performed in a hospital, and you may be able to go home on the same day.
Does it help?	Some people stop getting tonsillitis after some time (or get it less often) without treatment. But it’s not possible to predict whether that will happen.	Although you can no longer get tonsillitis after this operation, you can still have sore throats. 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.
What are the possible disadvantages?	You may keep on getting tonsillitis. But the “wait-and-see” approach generally doesn’t lead to complications, such as an infection that spreads to nearby tissue. It’s still a good idea to see a doctor if you have severe tonsillitis, though.	General risks associated with surgery. You may have temporary pain and trouble swallowing after the surgery. These symptoms are more severe if the tonsils are removed completely rather than partially. 5 out of 100 people have bleeding after surgery and may need to have another operation.	General risks associated with surgery. You may have temporary pain and trouble swallowing after the surgery. The risk of bleeding after surgery is probably lower than if the tonsils are removed completely. If the remaining tissue still keeps getting infected regularly, you may need to have a total tonsillectomy after all.
Who is the treatment suitable for?	For most people with recurrent tonsillitis.	For people who have severe bacterial tonsillitis at least 3 to 5 times per year and need to treat it with antibiotics.	For people who have severe bacterial tonsillitis at least 3 to 5 times per year and need to treat it with antibiotics.

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?
“Wait-and-see” approach / No treatment	<input type="radio"/>		
Complete removal of the tonsils	<input type="radio"/>		
Partial removal of the tonsils	<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 you don't start having tonsillitis less often and your 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 (get a second opinion).
- You can talk about it with your friends and family.



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

- Tonsillitis and the treatment options:
www.informedhealth.org/tonsillitis

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

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 used here:

- www.informedhealth.org/our-approach

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