Helping Your Child when Tonsils/Adenoids Are Removed

The tonsils and adenoids are small masses of spongy tissue. The tonsils are in the back of the throat on both sides of the tongue. The adenoids are at the back of the nose where the passages of the nose and throat meet.

Does my child have to have his or her tonsils out?
We might recommend taking your child’s tonsils out if your child is getting a lot of sore throats which are causing him or her to lose time from school. Another reason children have their tonsils removed is because they are too large and block their breathing at night.

What happens during the surgery?
Your child is given medication so he or she is asleep for the operation. This is called a general anesthetic or a general. The operation usually takes about 30 to 45 minutes.

Before the surgery
Tonsils and adenoids are removed either on a day care or admit day of surgery basis. Talk to your child’s Otolaryngologist (ENT - Ear, Nose & Throat Doctor) to know how long your child will stay.

Your child will need to be off school for almost 2 weeks to allow for proper rest and recuperation.

Call the ENT Clinic Nurse if your child has cold or flu symptoms, or a throat infection up to 2 weeks before surgery. This can increase the risk of bleeding following the operation. The ENT Doctor will assess your child and decide whether to:
- Go ahead with the surgery;
- Delay it to another time; or
- Plan to go ahead with the surgery but after the surgery have your child stay in hospital overnight to check on her or him.

Be prepared that your child might need medical attention after his or her surgery. Find out if you can easily get from your home to the nearest Emergency Department within 45 minutes. If you cannot, we recommend that you plan to stay with your child in the Lower Mainland for 12 days following surgery. Talk to the Family Support Coordinator or visit their website at www.bcchildrens.ca/fsrc for help with accommodation.

Information to help you and your child get ready:

Get this booklet “Your Child’s Surgery or Procedure” from your ENT Doctor’s office or the Surgical Day Care Unit.

Take the virtual tour at: www.bcchildrens.ca/surgerytour. This tour gives you information about:
- Getting ready for the surgery the weeks and day before.
- What happens the day of the surgery.
- Where your child will go.

Things to buy so I can care for my child at home:
- Have 2 types of pain medications. These are called:
  1. Acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol®) and
  2. Ibuprofen (e.g. Advil®).
- Choose a flavour and type of medication such as liquid, chewable tablets or pills that your child will like to take. If choosing liquid medicines, choose ones that are not coloured red because it can be confused with blood after the surgery.

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Please bring these medications in with you at the time of your child's surgery so the nurse can go over the appropriate dose for your child after surgery.

- Some soft foods like jello, yoghurt, custard, soup, or puddings.
- Cold juices such as apple juice. Do not offer your child juices such as orange, tomato or strawberry juice. These juices will sting your child’s throat. They have natural acids in them.
- Popsicles, freezies, ice cream and ingredients for smoothies.
- Chewing gum or gummy bears or both if your child is old enough so it is safe for her or him to have these.

After the surgery what to expect:

Sick to stomach
Your child may feel sick to her or his stomach. This is common for a few hours after this surgery. It is very important to restart your child’s drinking and eating as usual.

- If your child vomits, give nothing to eat or drink for about an hour, then try sips of water or a popsicle.
- Give small amounts of fluids frequently such as 1 teaspoon every 10 minutes to start with.

Bad breath
Your child may have bad smelling breath and mouth for about 10 days after the surgery.

- Brush the teeth, rinse with water a few times a day, and drink lots of fluids.
- DO NOT use mouthwash or gargle.

Stuffed up nose
Your child may feel ‘stuffed up’. After the adenoids are removed, the nose plugs up with mucus. The body makes mucus to help the wound heal. It may seem as if your child has a cold.

- Wipe the mucus gently. Don’t blow hard. The mucus may have a pinkish colour. This is normal.

Sore throat
Your child’s throat will hurt especially when swallowing. It takes 2 to 3 weeks for your child’s sore throat to heal completely. Your child’s throat will hurt for 1 to 2 weeks especially when swallowing.

- It is important to give your child pain medicine regularly even if he or she does not seem to be in a lot of pain. The pain medicine will help your child start eating and drinking normally.

Caring for and giving pain medication to your child
Your child’s weight is: ______ kg

Days 1 to 2 Following a Tonsillectomy (dates):

- Your child was given a dose of acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol®) at BC Children’s Hospital at __________(time).
- You can give the next dose of acetaminophen at __________(time).
  - Give the amount shown to you by the pharmacist which is _____ mls/chewable tablets/ pills. This is the same as _____mg or 10 mg/kg.
  - Note: the maximum allowed is 75mg/kg/day, but we have recommended less than this because of the number of days it will be used.
  - Give this dose every 4 hours.
- Wake your child at night to ensure acetaminophen is given regularly.

- PLUS: Your child was given a dose of ibuprofen (e.g. Advil®) at BC Children’s Hospital at ___________(time).
- You can give the next dose of ibuprofen at __________(time).
  - Give the amount shown to you by the pharmacist which is _____ mls/chewable tablets/ pills. This is the same as _____mg or 5 mg/kg. (Note: the maximum allowed is 40mg/kg/day).
  - Give this dose every 6 hours.
- Wake your child at night to ensure ibuprofen is given regularly.
Days 3 to 5 after surgery (dates):

- Give the amount of acetaminophen shown to you by the pharmacist which is _____ mls/chewable tablets/pills. This is the same as _____ mg or 10 mg/kg.
  - **Note**: the maximum allowed is 75mg/kg/day, but we have recommended less than this because of the number of days it will be used.
- Give this dose every 4 hours while your child is awake only as needed to control for pain.
- DO NOT wake your child to give pain medications on these dates.
- **DO NOT give ibuprofen.** (Ibuprofen is only to be given for the first 2 days after surgery.)

Days 5 to 8 after surgery (dates):

What to expect:

- Your child may be in more discomfort when the sores in the back of the throat may be coming off. Your child may have more pain and need more regular acetaminophen during these dates. This is the highest risk time of bleeding, but bleeding can occur as late as 17 days after surgery.
- Your child may also feel this as head or neck pain and some children can have an earache for up to 3 weeks after the surgery. These pains are called “referred” pain because the pain is from the throat but your child feels it in their ears, head &/or neck. Give pain medication to help relieve the pain and encourage your child to talk, eat and drink regularly. Doing this for the first weeks after surgery helps relieve the muscle tightening or spasms which cause some of the soreness. Offer gum or gummy bears if your child is old enough. Chewing helps to ease the pain by making spit or saliva that soothes the throat as it’s swallowed.
- Your child’s temperature may go up a little. He or she may be grumpy and seem sicker. This gets better in a day or so.
- Care for your child as you normally do when they are sick.

What else do I need to know to safely give these medications to my child for this time after a Tonsillectomy?

- **DO NOT** give your child more than these doses of acetaminophen for pain.
- DO NOT give any additional medications that have acetaminophen in them such as;
  - cough or cold medicine.
  - “Tylenol 1s”, “Tylenol 2s” or “Tylenol 3s”.
- If you are not sure if you can give another medication to your child, please check with your child’s ENT Doctor or your pharmacist.

What can I feed my child?

Your child will eat much less for a week or so after the surgery. He or she may even lose some weight. Once the throat heals, your child will go back to his or her normal eating patterns.
- Offer cold fluids that are soothing to the throat such as popsicles, freezies, ice cream, yoghurts, smoothies, puddings, and juices.
- Avoid any red coloured fluid as the red color can look like blood in the mouth or vomit.
- Avoid straws for at least a week as the sucking action may cause bleeding.
- When ready to eat more solid foods, start with soft foods.

When can my child return to his or her usual activities?

- Most children need to be home with plenty of rest for the 1st week.
- If your child feels well enough, he or she can play quietly as long as it’s not rough and tumble play.
- If your child feels well enough they can return to school after the 1st week but should remain inside for recess and lunch time.
- Avoid sports, tiring activities, and rough play for 2 weeks. No swimming for 2 weeks.

**Stay cool**
The back of the throat has many blood vessels. If the body gets very hot, these widen and the wound may bleed.
- For the 1st week it is best to avoid anything which makes your child hot, including the hot sun.
- Your child should have lukewarm baths or showers for 2 weeks.
- DO NOT allow your child to go in a hot tub for 2 weeks.

**Call your child's Family Doctor or the ENT Clinic Nurse at 604-875-2345 ext. 7053 or toll free in BC at 1-800-300-3088 ext. 7053 if:**
- Your child's temperature goes above 38 degrees Celsius or 100 degrees Fahrenheit for more than 3 days.
- Your child vomits for more than 24 hours after surgery.
- Your child looks like they're swallowing and you haven't given your child anything to eat or drink. Take your child to your nearest emergency department. They may be bleeding.
- Your child pees less than 2 times a day. Your child's urine should be pale yellow, NOT dark yellow or brown. Small amounts of dark urine are an indication that your child is not drinking enough liquids.
- Your child is having a lot of pain not relieved by medicine.
- Your child's breath is very unpleasant. Your child may have an infection that should be treated with antibiotics.
- You are worried about your child.

**Call 911 or go to your nearest emergency department if:**
- Your child spits or vomits any blood.
  If there is a significant amount of bleeding, call 911 and have your child lay on her or his side so that the blood does not collect at the back of the throat.

**Follow up appointments.**
Your child's ENT Doctor will usually want to see him or her after surgery.
- Make an appointment for your child to see your Family Doctor within 2 weeks.
- Make an appointment to see your child's ENT Doctor within 6 to 12 weeks. Please call the office at 604-875-2113 or toll free in BC 1-888-300-3088 ext. 2113.

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**Developed by the health professionals of the Department of Anesthesiology, the Acute Pain Service and the Division of Pediatric Otolaryngology (ENT - Ear, Nose & Throat) with assistance from the Learning & Development Department.**

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