

Tonsils/ Adenoids

Removal of tonsils and adenoids is the third most common surgery in America. This most commonly is done either for frequent infections or blockages and trouble breathing, especially at night (called obstructive sleep apnea). In the past tonsils were most commonly taken out for infections, but today most tonsils are taken out for sleep apnea.

What are tonsils needed for: The tonsils are a part of the body's immune system which guard the main entrance into the body. The problem is tonsils do too good a job of battling bacteria as they come into the body, and therefore are totally burned out and worthless by about the age of two.

Why do you remove tonsils: Mostly for recurrent infections and sleep apnea, but also for choking, cancer, tonsilloliths, or even bad breath.

What are adenoids: Adenoids are the same type of tissue as tonsils, only they are in the back of the nose instead of the back of the throat.

How do you take tonsils out: They are all taken out through the mouth. The mouth is held open during the entire procedure, and sometime the pressure on the tongue can cause some tongue discomfort. In most kids I use a Coblator and ionized sodium atoms to remove the tonsils. In adults a Bovie with monopolar electrical cautery is usually used as it controls large blood vessels better.

Important post-op instructions: Drinking plenty of water is far and away the most important thing after a tonsillectomy; also nothing crunchy for 2 full weeks after surgery.

Unlike most surgeries a tonsillectomy has a relatively high bleed rate of between 2-5 percent. This is regardless of how or who take out the tonsils. This bleeding does not happen in the days following surgery, but in the week after. Most tonsillar bleeding occurs on days 7-10 after surgery. This is because the scab is getting soft in preparation to fall off. If it falls off early it will bleed. This is why crunchy foods are avoided, they can scrape off the scab early.

Long term ramifications: As tonsils are burned out by about age 2 there are very few ramifications of removing tonsils and adenoids.

How long does surgery last: The surgery itself only takes 10-15 minutes, but going to sleep and waking back up again can take much longer. This is especially true of young kids because they do not place an IV line until the child is asleep. This is a much less traumatic way for the child, but it can often take 15-20 minutes to get an IV started on some children.

