

Tonsillitis



What is Tonsillitis?

Tonsillitis involves infection of the pharyngeal tonsils (at the back of the throat). These are symmetrical areas of lymphoid tissue located in the pharynx, on either side of the hard palate.

Symptoms

If you have tonsillitis you may have some of the following symptoms:

- sore throat
- tiredness
- high temperature
- pain when you swallow
- bad breath
- ear pain
- headache

You may also notice that:

- you have red and swollen tonsils
- the back of your throat is red
- there are white spots on your tonsils (this is pus from the infection)
- the glands in your neck are bigger than usual

Complications

Tonsillitis can cause complications such as:

- middle ear infections (otitis media)
- an abscess on or around the tonsils which may restrict breathing (quinsy)
- inflammation of the sinuses (sinusitis)
- a lung infection such as bronchitis or pneumonia
- inflammation of the kidney (acute glomerulonephritis)

- inflammation of the joints and muscles (reactive arthritis)
- haemolytic *Streptococcus* bacterial infection (scarlet fever)

Causes

The virus or bacterium causing the infection can be passed between people. For example if you are in direct contact with an infected person, or you are near them when they cough or sneeze. The droplets of infected mucus or saliva suspended in the air can then be breathed in by you.

Statistics on Tonsillitis

Tonsillitis usually occurs in children between 4 and 7 years of age. It is rare in those under 2 or over 40.

Risk Factors for Tonsillitis

Tonsillitis may be caused by viral or bacterial infection. The viruses causing tonsillitis are the same viruses causing the common cold (rhinovirus, parainfluenza and influenza virus, respiratory syncytial virus, adenovirus) as well as the Epstein-Barr Virus (EBV) which causes glandular fever. Bacterial tonsillitis is usually due to *Group A beta-haemolytic streptococci*.

Treatment

1.] Self-help

Your infection may be mild and you may not need treatment. There are several things you can do to help yourself feel better.

- Rest in a quiet, warm place and try to sleep.
- Ensure you drink enough fluids as dehydration can make you feel worse.
- Sucking throat pastilles which contain a mild anaesthetic may help to soothe your throat.
- Gargling with salt water may ease the pain in your throat.

2.] Medicines

Benzydamine hydrochloride spray helps to relieve pain associated with tonsillitis. Before taking any medicines ask your pharmacist for advice. Follow the instructions in the patient information leaflet that comes with the medicine.

3.] Surgery

If you have tonsillitis more than five times a year or you have had symptoms for more than a year, and your tonsillitis stops you doing normal activities, your doctor may suggest you have your tonsils removed. This procedure is called a tonsillectomy. Before you choose this treatment you should discuss it with your doctor as the operation also has complications. As young children get older, throat infections occur less often so they may not need surgery.