
POST OPERATIVE INSTRUCTIONS TONSILLECTOMY

WHAT TO EXPECT AFTER SURGERY

After tonsils are removed, there is a raw surface on the sides of the throat where the tonsils used to be. Because this takes 7-10 days for the mucous membrane to heal, this is usually painful for the first 7 days after surgery and gradually improves each day thereafter. The tonsil area becomes coated with white/yellow thickened mucous which acts as a protective covering while the area heals. This “eschar” begins to fall off after about 7 days. This often increases the throat pain and can cause pain to be felt in the ears. The ear pain normally subsides in a few days, but pain can still be felt when yawning or sneezing even after 2 weeks after the procedure. The tonsil area completely heals in 2 to 3 weeks in most instances.

The uvula, the finger-like tissue that hangs down from the soft palate in the back of the throat, will usually become swollen on the first day or two after surgery. This is normal and is due to the cauterization of the tonsil blood vessels that forces the uvula to swell up until the glands develop an alternative drainage pattern. This can cause patients to have a sensation of something in their throat and feel that their throat is “blocked”. This does not happen and can be improved by drinking cold liquids. This swelling usually lasts 5-7 days after surgery.

DIET

Begin with clear liquids immediately after surgery and increase to full liquids such as soup or broth with soft diet often by dinner time the day of surgery. Diet can return to near normal after 10 days and completely normal after 2 weeks.

Fluid intake is most important after surgery. One of the first signs of dehydration is fever, often 101 degrees. If patients are unable to tolerate fluids for 24 hrs they will need to return to an ER for IV fluids.

ACTIVITY

Activity is restricted after surgery: no PE or active team sports for children and no strenuous activities for adults for 10 days following surgery.

MEDICATIONS

Patients are sent home with a prescription for oral antibiotics that are intended to help the healing process and should be taken until completed.

Pain medication following tonsillectomy can be either narcotic or non-narcotic medications. Narcotic medications are not prescribed to children less than 8 yrs of age due to dangerous side effects. For those patients, the recommendations are to alternate liquid Tylenol and Motrin/Advil every 3 hrs. For adults who experience nausea or other side effects from narcotic medications, they may also alternate Tylenol and Motrin/Advil every 3 hrs.

REASONS TO CONTACT THE PHYSICIAN ON-CALL

Persistent nausea/vomiting, any oral bleeding, fever greater than 102 degrees.