

## DESCRIPTION

Tonsils that are inflamed (red, sore, and swollen). The tonsils are located at the back of the throat on each side. They are small at birth, enlarge during childhood, and become smaller during the teen years. Tonsils usually help prevent infections in the nose, mouth, and throat from spreading to other body parts. However, they themselves may become infected. Tonsillitis can be spread from person to person. It affects all ages, but is most common in children between ages 5 and 10.

## FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Sore throat and pain when swallowing.
- Tonsils are redder than normal.
- Throat may have white or yellow patches.
- Swollen glands on either side of the jaw.
- Fever.
- Headache.
- Ear pain.
- Very young children may not want to eat.

## CAUSES

Usually a bacterial (often *Streptococcus*, or "strep", as it is called) or a viral infection.

## RISK INCREASES WITH

- Young children.
- Day-care centers. For both children and teachers.
- Living, working, or being in crowded places.
- Smoking.
- Having a chronic illness, such as diabetes.

## EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Symptoms generally begin to improve in 2 to 3 days. Treatment will take longer to be ensure that germs are gone. If tonsillitis is severe and occurs often, your health care provider may suggest surgery (tonsillectomy) to remove the tonsils.

## POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Abscess (an infected sore on the tonsils).
- Chronic tonsillitis. It can cause ear infection and enlarged tonsils. This may lead to breathing problems and snoring.
- Rheumatic fever may occur if the cause is strep and it is not treated, or if treatment is stopped too soon.

## GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will examine your head, neck, and throat. Medical tests may include a rapid strep test and a throat culture (to find which germ is the cause). Family members may need a strep test also. A person may carry the strep germ, but not have any symptoms.
- Treatment usually involves drugs and self-care.
- To relieve the sore throat, gargle frequently with warm or cold double-strength tea or warm salt water (mix one-half teaspoon of salt in one cup of water).
- Suck on hard candy, such as lemon drops, to increase moisture in the mouth.
- If surgery to remove the tonsils is needed, your health care provider will discuss the details. It is usually done on an outpatient basis.

## MEDICATIONS

If the cause is strep, take prescribed antibiotic (usually penicillin) for at least 10 days, or as directed.

- Oral steroids may also be prescribed to reduce inflammation.
  - You should begin your steroid prescription today.
  - You should begin your steroid prescription tomorrow.

Your doctor also recommends the following over-the-counter medications. These medications may offer significant symptom relief:

- For fever or pain use acetaminophen or ibuprofen.  
(Acetaminophen and ibuprofen may also be alternated every 3 hours for persistent fever or pain.)
- Antihistamine
- Decongestant (Such as Phenylephrine or Pseudoephedrine)
- Mucolytic (Such as Guaifenesin)
- Cough Suppressant (Such as Dextromethorphan)
- Throat Lozenges
- Saline Nasal Spray or Drops
- Decongestant Nasal Spray (Limit use to 3 days)
- ↳ Unless your doctor tells you differently, always finish the full course of your antibiotic and/or steroid prescription, even if you start to feel better.
- ↳ Antibiotics and steroids may interfere with the effectiveness of birth control pills. Use an alternative method of contraception for the remainder of the month after finishing your antibiotic and/or steroid prescription.

**SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IF:**

- Symptoms worsen, or other symptoms occur during treatment.
- If there is any trouble with breathing, seek medical attention immediately!