



The Children's Doctor

All you need to know about...

Tonsillitis



What are the tonsils?

Tonsils are clusters of lymph tissue on the right and left sides of the upper throat. Tonsils seem to have a role in fighting disease during childhood and are thought to be frontline defense in protecting the airways against incoming germs.

What is tonsillitis?

Tonsillitis means inflammation or infection of the tonsils. It may occur with pharyngitis (infection of the throat). Tonsillitis usually presents with fever, sore throat and pain on swallowing. Other symptoms may include a white coating on the tonsils, tender enlarged lymph nodes in the neck and bad breath. The cause of the infection may be viruses or bacteria. In early childhood, viral tonsillitis is much more common than bacterial tonsillitis.

How can I treat tonsillitis?

The best management of children with a sore throat is lots of rest and lots of fluids. Children with a sore throat generally do not want to eat solids but you can try soft solids such as icecream and jelly! Paracetamol can be used to manage any discomfort or fever. The child should stay home from school or preschool as viral tonsillitis is highly infectious. If the sore throat persists for 48 hours or more then the child should be reviewed by a doctor.

Most episodes of tonsillitis will resolve spontaneously without the need for antibiotics. The body is able to fight viral infections and some bacterial infections without antibiotics. However, if you are concerned, it is important to have your child reviewed by a doctor to exclude a more serious illness.

Will my child need a tonsillectomy?

Tonsillectomy is rarely performed for recurrent tonsillitis. In extreme cases, where the development of the child is suffering as a consequence of recurrent illness, tonsillectomy will be considered. The main reason to pursue tonsillectomy is obstructive symptoms due to persistently enlarged tonsils. If the tonsils are very large, they may interfere with breathing and swallowing.

If your child has persistent fever or sore throat or you are concerned that your child is unwell, you should see your doctor.