Caring for Your Child after a Tonsillectomy

What is a tonsillectomy?
A tonsillectomy is surgery to remove lymph tissue (tonsils) that lies on either side of the back of the throat.

What to Expect
After you go home you may expect:
- Sore throat, especially when swallowing. This may last 7-10 days.
- Ear, jaw, and neck pain. It may not start until 3-4 days after surgery. This may last for 7-10 days.
- Try to avoid excess clearing of the throat.
- Your child may have nausea and vomiting. Your doctor may prescribe a medicine to help with this at home.
- A low grade fever is normal, up to 102° regardless of the method used to take a temperature, for up to 7 days after surgery.
- A yellow-grey membrane where the tonsils were removed. It will slowly go away as the area heals, often in 3-4 weeks.
- Restless, disturbed sleep or nightmares may occur for a couple of weeks.
- Bad breath. Your child’s breath may be bad smelling for many days while the throat is healing. Drinking plenty of liquids helps decrease the odor.

Pain Relief
Your doctor will suggest medicine for sore throat and ear pain. Be sure to focus on pain control so that your child can drink plenty of fluids.

Your doctor may suggest giving acetaminophen (Tylenol®), in combination with ibuprofen. You will be told of the dosages for both medicines on the day of surgery.
- Give these medicines for the first 48-72 hours around the clock.
- A prescription may also be written for severe pain and may be used as directed if acetaminophen (Tylenol®) in combination with ibuprofen is not enough.
- Try to time the pain medicine so that your child takes it about 1 hour before meals. This will help to decrease pain when swallowing.
- An ice pack may help. You may want to put a small bag of frozen corn or peas in a plastic bag and wrap it in a towel. Place it on the throat for 20 minutes at a time.
- A humidifier or vaporizer may ease throat soreness.

Activity
Limit your child’s activity for one (1) week.
- Your child should avoid strenuous exercise and activity, swimming, or lifting more than 25 lbs.
- Be sure your child gets plenty of rest.
- Plan for your child to be out of school or daycare for at least 1 week.

Diet
Your child may lose weight from eating less than normal. This is ok as long as she is drinking plenty of fluids.

Follow the “tonsillectomy diet” for one (1) week. This means:
- Begin with clear liquids such as: water, broth, apple juice, popsicles, Jell-o®, Hi-C®, and Kool-Aid®. Cold or lukewarm liquids may feel better at first but any temperature your
child prefers is fine. Frequent small sips are better than quickly drinking a large amount of fluid and then not drinking for the next few hours.

- Other foods that your child may like are pudding, ice cream, milkshakes, and cream soup.
- Your child may eat soft foods as soon as he feels able to. Soft foods include: scrambled eggs, mashed potatoes, macaroni and cheese, cooked cereal, yogurt, and apple sauce.
- Some children eat solid foods earlier than others. Your child will eat solid foods when he is able to swallow better. It is normal if your child does not want to eat solid foods the first week. It is vital that he drink plenty of liquids. Acidic or spicy foods (orange or grapefruit juice, tomatoes) may make your child’s throat more sore, but won’t do him any harm.
- **Do not** eat foods that are rough and crunchy for an entire week. They may scratch your child’s throat and cause bleeding. This includes:
  - popcorn
  - pretzels
  - potato chips, other chips
  - nuts
  - cold cereal

**Follow-Up**
Your child will not have a follow-up clinic visit unless there is a problem. You may call at any time with questions or concerns.

**When to Call the Doctor or Clinic Nurse**
Call one of the phone numbers below if your child has:
- **Any bleeding**
- Nausea and vomiting that do not go away.
- A fever over 102° regardless of the method used to take temperature
- Pain not controlled with medicine.
- A feeling that your child is not recovering as she should. It takes about 7-10 days before she will start to feel better.
- Dehydration. Your child should be urinating at least twice in 24 hours.

**Phone Numbers**
Pediatric Otolaryngology (ENT) Clinic: Call **(608) 265-7760**, weekdays from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm.

After clinic hours and weekends: Call **(608) 262-0486**. This will give you the paging operator. Ask for the ENT doctor on call. Give the operator your name and phone number with the area code. The doctor will call you back.

If outside the Madison area, call toll free **1-800-323-8942**.

If you are a patient receiving care at UnityPoint – Meriter, Swedish American or a health system outside of UW Health, please use the phone numbers provided in your discharge instructions for any questions or concerns.