

Information for Patients

Surgery to remove your tonsils (tonsillectomy) for recurrent tonsillitis is a procedure which should only be carried out when specific criteria are met. Although the operation was common many years ago, this is no longer the case because the medical evidence tells us the intervention can sometimes do more harm than good and there are alternative treatments for treating sore throats.

About the condition

Recurring sore throats are a very common condition. It must be recognised that not all sore throats are due to tonsillitis and they can be caused by other infections of the throat. In these cases, removing the tonsils will not improve symptoms.

It's important you and your doctor make a shared decision about what's best for you or your child if the sore throat is becoming a problem. When deciding what's best you should both consider the benefits, the risks, the alternatives and what will happen if you do nothing.

What are the **BENEFITS** of the intervention?

Surgery to remove your tonsils will only benefit those with recurrent episodes of acute tonsillitis.

What are the **RISKS** of the intervention?

Tonsillectomies require an operation and the risks include: infection, bleeding, pain, difficulty swallowing and the risks of anaesthetic. Pain after surgery can be severe for up to a fortnight after the procedure.

What are the **ALTERNATIVES**?

There are many alternative treatments to ease a sore throat. During acute episodes, you should rest, as the symptoms usually improve after a few days. Drink plenty of water and gargle regularly with salt water. Pain killers, throat lozenges or sprays to reduce the inflammation can all be bought over the counter at your chemist.

What if you do **NOTHING**?

Sore throats can be painful and you may not be able to eat or drink comfortably. Doing nothing will not be harmful, some of the suggested alternatives above may help ease the symptoms, and prevent the need for surgery. If the symptoms persist and you cannot tolerate the pain you should see your doctor.

You can find out more about the [NHS Evidence Based Interventions](#) programme online.