

## Tonsillitis

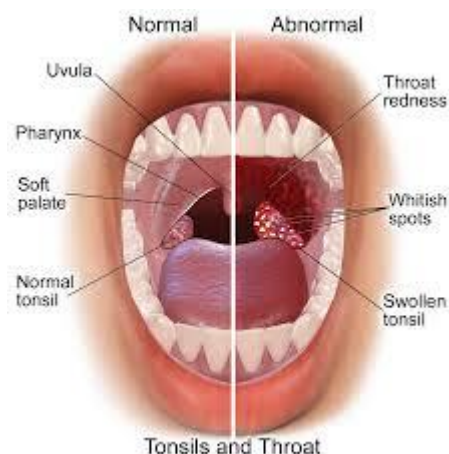
### What Is Tonsillitis?

Tonsils are the two lymph nodes located on each side of the back of your throat. They function as a defense mechanism, helping to prevent infection from entering the rest of your body. When the tonsils themselves become infected, the condition is called tonsillitis.

Tonsillitis can occur at any age and is a common childhood ailment. It is most often diagnosed in children from preschool age through their mid teens. Symptoms include a sore throat, swollen tonsils, and fever.

This condition can be caused by a variety of common viruses and bacteria and is contagious. If left untreated, tonsillitis caused by strep throat (*Streptococcus* bacteria) can lead to serious complications.

Tonsillitis is easily diagnosed and treated. Symptoms usually fully resolve within seven to 10 days.



### Causes of Tonsillitis

Tonsils are your first line of defense against illness and they produce white blood cells to help your body fight infection. The tonsils combat bacteria and viruses that enter your body through the mouth, but are vulnerable to infection from these invaders themselves.

Tonsillitis can be caused by a virus, such as the common cold, or by a bacterial infection, such as strep throat.

Children come into close contact with others at school and play, exposing them to a variety of viruses and bacteria. This makes them particularly vulnerable to the germs that cause tonsillitis.



## Symptoms of Tonsillitis

There are many symptoms of tonsillitis, but you are unlikely to have them all. The most common include:

- a very sore throat
- difficulty swallowing or painful swallowing
- a scratchy-sounding voice
- bad breath
- fever
- chills
- earaches
- stomach aches
- headaches
- a stiff neck
- jaw and neck tenderness (due to swollen lymph nodes)
- tonsils that appear red and swollen
- tonsils that have white or yellow spots

In very young children, you may also notice increased irritability, poor appetite, or excessive drooling. **Seek immediate medical care if you or your child is having difficulty breathing because the swollen tonsils may be obstructing the airways.**

## How Tonsillitis Is Diagnosed

Diagnosis is based on a physical examination of the throat and may include a throat culture. To take a throat culture, your doctor will gently swab the back of your throat and send the sample to a laboratory to identify the cause of your throat infection.

## Treatment for Tonsillitis

A mild case of tonsillitis does not necessarily require treatment, particularly if it is caused by a virus, such as a cold.

Treatments for more severe cases of tonsillitis may include:

- **Antibiotics:** Antibiotics will be prescribed to fight a bacterial infection. It is important that you complete the full course of antibiotics. Your doctor may want you to schedule a follow-up visit to ensure that the medication was effective.
- **Tonsillectomy:** Surgery to remove the tonsils is called a tonsillectomy. This was once a very common procedure. However, tonsillectomies today are only recommended for people who experience repeated tonsillitis, tonsillitis that does not respond to other treatment, or tonsillitis that causes complications.

## Home Care Tips to Ease a Sore Throat

- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Get lots of rest.
- Gargle with warm salt water several times a day.
- Use throat lozenges. (Throat lozenges can be a choking hazard for very young children.)
- Use a humidifier to moisten the air in your home.
- Avoid smoke.
- Use over-the-counter pain medications, such as acetaminophen and ibuprofen. (Aspirin can be dangerous for children. Always check with your doctor before giving aspirin to children.)



## Outlook for Tonsillitis

Swollen tonsils may cause difficulty breathing, which can lead to disturbed sleep. Tonsillitis that is left untreated can result in the infection spreading to the area behind the tonsils or to the surrounding tissue.

If tonsillitis is caused by a strep throat infection that is not treated or does not go away, it could lead to rheumatic fever (inflammation of the heart, joints, and other tissues), or to post-streptococcal glomerulonephritis (inflammation of the kidneys).

Symptoms of tonsillitis caused by a bacterial infection usually improve a few days after you begin taking antibiotics. Strep throat is considered contagious until you have been taking antibiotics for a 24-hour period.

Tonsillitis generally resolves completely within seven to 10 days.

## Preventing Tonsillitis

Tonsillitis is highly contagious. To decrease your odds of getting tonsillitis, stay away from people who have active infections. Wash your hands often, especially after coming into contact with someone who has a sore throat, is coughing, or is sneezing. If you have tonsillitis, do your best to stay away from others until you are no longer contagious.



