Care After Your Child’s Tonsil Surgery

What are tonsils? The tonsils are two pads of tissue located on either side of the back of the throat. Tonsils can enlarge because of repeated tonsil infections or strep throat. Also, germs (bacteria) can build up on the tonsils.

Reasons for tonsillectomy (removal of the tonsils)
• Tonsil infections or strep throat that keep coming back, despite antibiotic therapy, may be a reason to remove tonsils.
• Enlarged tonsils can block the airway and cause trouble breathing or swallowing.

Preparing for surgery
• Do not give your child aspirin, ibuprofen or Pepto Bismol for 10 days before surgery and up to 2 weeks after surgery.
• You may give acetaminophen (Tylenol).
• Please tell your doctor if there is a family history of bleeding tendencies or if your child tends to bruise easily.

About the surgery
Tonsillectomy is done as an outpatient procedure. Your child will be asleep for the surgery, which takes about 30 minutes. Your child will stay at the hospital for about 4 hours after surgery.

What to expect after surgery
It takes most children 7 to 10 days to recover.
• Sore throat is common and may get worse 7 to 10 days after surgery. Crust or scabs in the back of the throat fall off at this time, causing pain and sometimes a small amount of bleeding.
• Bad breath is normal, caused by the scabs that form after surgery, and can last up to 3 weeks.
• White patches in the throat may occur.
• The tongue may swell slightly or have sores. This is normal and will go away in a few days.

Caring for your child after surgery
Here are some tips for helping your child as he or she recovers from surgery.

Bleeding
• Due to recent advances, bleeding after surgery is very rare in the first 24 hours (when it was once common).
• The main risk for bleeding now occurs from 7 to 10 days after surgery when the scabs in the back of the throat fall off. If you notice bleeding at this time, have your child gargle with an ice water solution (swish and spit out – do not swallow) for up to 15 minutes or until he/she stops spitting blood.
• If bleeding persists or is very heavy with vomiting (more than 4 tablespoons), call your doctor or go to the emergency department.

Pain
• Throat pain, ear pain and headache are common for 10 to 14 days. The worst pain usually occurs the first 4 to 7 days after surgery. The pain also will increase after the scabs dissolve, usually 6 to 8 days after surgery.
• Follow the recommended acetaminophen dose based upon your child’s weight.
• Do not exceed the recommended acetaminophen dose in a 24 hour period.
• Do not use aspirin or products containing aspirin or ibuprofen because they can promote bleeding.
• Eating ice chips or placing an ice pack on the neck may relieve some pain.

Fever
• It is normal for your child to run a low-grade fever between 99°F and 101°F for the first few days after surgery. Fever is made worse by not drinking enough.
• If the fever does not go down after acetaminophen (Tylenol) or is higher than 101.5°F degrees, call your doctor.

Diet
• Liquids are very important. Make an effort to offer fluids often when your child is awake, especially during the first 2 days after surgery.
The liquids should have sugar and calories. Avoid caffeinated and diet drinks.

- Your child may eat whatever is desired without worrying about damaging the throat. But, foods that have hard, sharp edges, such as potato chips, may be uncomfortable to swallow.
- A diet high in protein will help shorten recovery time and decrease pain. It’s best to eat foods such as eggs, soups made with beans, peas or meat. You can also use Ensure, PediaSure or a powdered protein drink for extra protein (some people add this to a milk shake for taste).
- A vitamin supplement, especially one containing vitamin C, helps tissues heal.

For Your Well-Being

Activity
- Resting at home is best for the first 48 hours after surgery. Activity may be increased slowly after this time.
- Avoid vigorous physical activity, swimming or organized sports for 2 weeks after surgery.
- Some children feel better after the first week and try to do normal activities. But, this is about the time the scabs fall off, and the chance for bleeding will increase if your child is too active.

School
- Your child may return to school when feeling up to it.
- Your child should be sleeping, eating and drinking well before going back to school, and should be off pain medication.

Follow up care
- Your child may need a follow-up visit. Ask your doctor about this, and call the office to schedule an appointment.
- If you have problems, questions or concerns at any time, please call your doctor’s office.