

Tonsillitis

Tonsillitis normally goes away after a few days. Treatment can ease the symptoms. See a doctor if symptoms are severe or persist.

Tonsillitis is an infection of the tonsils at the back of the mouth. A sore throat is the common symptom. In addition, you may also have a cough, fever, headache, feel sick, feel tired, painful swallowing, and swollen neck glands. Pus may appear as white spots on the enlarged tonsils. Symptoms typically get worse over 2-3 days and then gradually go, usually within a week.

What is the treatment for tonsillitis?

- **Not treating** is an option as many tonsil infections are mild and soon get better.
- **Have plenty to drink.** It is tempting not to drink much if swallowing is painful. This may lead to mild dehydration, particularly if you also have a fever. Mild dehydration can make headaches and tiredness much worse.
- **Tylenol or ibuprofen** ease pain, headache, and fever. A regular full dose is better than 'now and then' to ease pain until symptoms go. Tylenol is also available as soluble tablets and in liquid form for children.
- **Other gargles, lozenges, and sprays** that you can buy at pharmacies may help to soothe a sore throat. However, they do not shorten the illness. They tend to be expensive, and may do little extra to ease symptoms than the above measures.

Do I need an antibiotic?

Usually not. Most bouts of tonsillitis are due to viruses, although some are due to bacteria. It is usually not possible to tell if it is a viral or bacterial infection. Antibiotics kill bacteria, but do not kill viruses. However, an antibiotic is not thought to make much difference even if bacteria cause the tonsil infection. The body's immune system normally fights off throat and tonsil infections quickly, whether caused by viruses or bacteria. Antibiotics can sometimes cause side effects such as diarrhea, rash, and stomach upsets.

An antibiotic may be advised if the infection is severe, if it is not easing after a few days, or if your immune system is not working properly (for example, if you have had your spleen removed or if you are taking chemotherapy, etc).

Occasionally, tonsillitis is due to an uncommon cause such as glandular fever. See a doctor if symptoms are severe, or if they do not ease within 3-4 days.

What about having my tonsils taken out?

Removing the tonsils (tonsillectomy) may be an option if you have frequent and severe bouts of tonsillitis. That is, five or more infections over a year. Also, when each infection is severe enough to affect normal life (such as needing time off work or school). The value of tonsillectomy is uncertain. Throat infections are not prevented if the tonsils are removed. However, for some people, the number and severity of throat infections may be reduced after tonsillectomy.