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## **Tonsils and Adenoids**

### **What are they and why do we have them?**

Tonsils and adenoids are collections of glandular tissue located in the back of the throat and nose. They are similar to lymph glands located throughout your neck and body. The tonsils are two lumps of tissue located on either side of the back of your throat and can be seen when you look in the mirror and stick out your tongue. The adenoids are located way in the back of your throat above the soft palate and can only be seen using a special mirror or endoscope. The tonsils and adenoids are located near your breathing passages. They are exposed to air that we breathe. It is thought that they help in the manufacture of antibodies that help the body fight off infections. This function is most important early in life and is less important after the age of three. In general, it is a small part of our protection against infection.

### **What goes wrong?**

Sometimes the tonsils or adenoids become chronically infected. They become inflamed and painful. They no longer perform useful function and instead they become enlarged and cause sore throats and sometimes trouble with breathing or swallowing. Tonsils can develop an abscess or crypts (pits) and produce foul-smelling, cheesy formations. These pits can harbor chronic infections. Sometimes children have very large tonsils or adenoids that cause respiratory obstruction or sleep apnea. Sleep apnea can lead to sleep problems, daytime sleepiness, irritability, and behavior problems.

### **When should I seek treatment?**

You should see your doctor if your or your child has common symptoms of infected and enlarged tonsils and adenoids such as:

- frequent sore throats
- bad breath
- nasal congestion
- post-nasal drainage
- nasal or breathing obstruction
- recurrent ear infections
- mouth-breathing
- snoring
- sleep disturbances.

### **What will the doctor do?**

The doctor will ask you several questions about the problems you for your child have been having. He will then do a physical exam of your head and neck. He may want to take a culture from your throat to determine if you have a chronic infection. He may also order x-rays or blood tests.

### **Then what?**

If the doctor determines that you need to have your tonsils or adenoids removed he will discuss surgery options with you. The surgery is performed under general anesthesia and usually takes less than an hour. It is done in a hospital and in most cases you can go home the same day. You will have a sore throat for several days after surgery. You will be prescribed antibiotics and pain medications.