

# Tonsillitis

## What is tonsillitis?

Tonsillitis is an infection of the tonsils, which lie at the back of your throat.

The most common causes are viruses like the common cold but sometimes a bacterium, such as Streptococcus, is the culprit.

In younger adults you may have glandular fever or infectious mononucleosis.

Your doctor should give you an opinion as to which is most likely in your case.

## Why did I get tonsillitis?

The viruses and bacteria that cause tonsillitis are spread by direct person to person contact, even from just breathing the same air.

There is no foolproof way of preventing it spreading, but regular hand-washing as well as covering your mouth when you cough and sneeze goes a long way.

## Treatment

Viral tonsillitis has no specific treatment, but good pain relief to allow you to keep up an adequate fluid intake is important.

Bacterial tonsillitis can be treated with antibiotics but these are not essential, as the infection will settle with time.

More severe cases may need steroids to help reduce the swelling and inflammation, and fluids via an intravenous (IV) drip if you're unable to swallow.

## Pain relief

Simple pain killers, such as paracetamol and ibuprofen, are usually sufficient for most sore throats. Check with your doctor if anti-inflammatories (like ibuprofen) are safe for you.

Sore throat lozenges, throat sprays or gargles can be very effective. Ask your local pharmacist which ones are best for you.

## Drinking

You may become dehydrated if you don't drink enough fluids.

You should drink approximately 2 litres in a 24 hour period depending on your size and the climate you live in.

Good pain relief can help you with this, but if you are still unable to drink, come back to the hospital.

## Eating

It is safe for a healthy adult to go a few days without food.

Diabetics and young children need to maintain an intake of food. If this applies to you, ask your doctor what to do about your diet over the next few days.

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## What to look out for?

Sometimes, bacterial tonsillitis can progress to cause an abscess within or next to one of your tonsils, or more rarely to other sites in the neck. This usually requires a a minor surgical procedure to drain the infection.

Signs of an abscess, or “quinsy” are:

- a change in your voice
- difficulty opening your mouth
- an inability to swallow
- worsening pain.

If you have any new symptoms which you’re worried about, you should return to the Emergency Department or follow-up with your local doctor.

## What happens if I have an abscess?

Antibiotics alone are not always effective if you have developed an abscess. You may need to have the pus drained. This can be done by:

- Needle aspiration—using a needle and syringe to draw out the pus
- Incision and drainage—using a scalpel to make a small cut into the abscess.

These procedures can be performed in the Emergency Department. You will usually remain awake for the procedure, but will be given local anaesthetic to numb the area.

## Seeking help:

 In a medical emergency go to your nearest emergency department or call 000.

## Instructions:

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