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Tonsillitis

- **What are tonsils? Do all of us have them?**

Tonsils are oval shaped lymph nodes situated at the back of oral cavity on two sides. These are normal structures and all of us have tonsils. These conventionally mentioned tonsils are the palatine tonsils.

Similarly, we have tonsils at the back of the tongue, wall of the throat and inner side of nose (adenoids).



- **What is tonsillitis?**

Infection of the tonsils is called tonsillitis. It presents with pain in the throat, difficulty in swallowing, fever, enlarged swelling in neck etc. These symptoms are of acute tonsillitis. When one gets multiple episodes of such infection in a year, they are said to have chronic tonsillitis. In-between episodes patients do not have any symptoms.

Adenoids are tonsils on the inner aspect of nose (Nasopharynx). Enlarged size leads to snoring mouth breathing and recurrent episodes of cold.

- **How is it diagnosed?**

The doctor mainly bases the diagnosis on symptomatology and a detailed examination. The tonsils are seen to be enlarged in size, red in colour.

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There may or may not be white spots or patches on the tonsils. Lymph nodes in the neck are enlarged and become tender. A doctor needs to rule out conditions as Diphtheria, Candidiasis or Infectious Mononucleosis.

Blood tests and Throat Cultures help in the diagnosis and can guide the treatment of this condition.

- **What is the treatment?**

Mainstay of treatment of acute conditions is giving appropriate antibiotics for correct duration. Supportive treatment includes medicines to decrease pain and fever.

For further relief proper rest, plenty of warm fluids in diet, gargling with warm saline are advised. One could use medicated solutions as Chlorhexidine or Povidone Iodine for gargling, Sucking Candies, or lozenges helps in relieving pain and irritation.

Steam and nasal decongestant drops help in adenoids.

For chronic tonsillitis (more than 4/5 episodes per year) surgery is recommended. The percentage of patients requiring surgery is very low. Number of episodes can be decreased by adopting healthy lifestyle, which includes-

1. Regular exercise
2. Regular gargling
3. Avoiding triggering foodstuffs
4. Healthy food

If symptoms persist, surgery is recommended. For snoring and mouth breathing, adenoidectomy is recommended.

- **Why surgery?**

Every episode of illness hampers the physical and mental health of the child. Physical health is affected in terms of losing weights, failure to grow tall etc. Mental health is affected as child misses school, and opportunity to learn during the illness period.

Though surgery helps the child to achieve natural growth, it does not help to increase height in children who do not have symptoms.

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Presence of adenoids can cause permanent changes in facial features, dentition, and tummy upset.

- **Alternatives to surgery:**

Alternative homeopathy and Ayurvedic medicines can be tried but should be tried for a certain period (upto 3 months). If good results are obtained with complete reduction of symptoms, treatment can be continued. If symptoms are present, one should go ahead with surgery.

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