

My child's tonsillectomy

Before the day of surgery

Inform your child's school that they will need 2 weeks off school to recover and heal. Please get in touch with the hospital if your child has a new sore throat or a cold in the week before the operation, as it may be safer to reschedule surgery for a few weeks later.

On the day of surgery

If surgery is in the morning:

- Your child can eat and drink normally until 12:00 midnight.
- From midnight until 7am, they should only have water or weak squash.
- Any medication should be taken as usual, unless instructed otherwise.

If surgery is in the afternoon:

- Your child can have a light breakfast before 8am.
- Until midday, they should only have water or weak squash.
- Any medication should be taken as usual, unless instructed otherwise.

In the day surgery unit

One adult should stay with their child on Day Surgery Unit (DSU). Your child will be checked in by DSU or Sarum ward staff. Height and weight will be measured and you will be escorted to a bedspace. A number of other children will usually be having surgery on the same day.

Before surgery, you and your child will be seen by an anaesthetist and a surgeon, who will go through the consent paperwork and will discuss any medical conditions or allergies your child might have, the general anaesthetic and going into theatre. Your child will often be prescribed paracetamol and ibuprofen to take before going into theatre. When they are asleep, your child will be given more pain relief.

Immediately after surgery

When the operation is finished, your child will be moved to the Recovery room, where they will have time to wake up properly. Pain, sickness and bleeding will be monitored and treated. If your child usually has difficulty communicating when they are in pain, please let us know how they usually express pain. We will reunite you with your child at the earliest safe opportunity once they are awake.

Going home

Most children are well enough to go home from hospital on the day of surgery, once they are eating and drinking. Sometimes pain or bleeding can mean children need to stay in hospital overnight.

What should my child eat?

Eat and drink as normal after surgery, this helps to prevent infection and relieve pain. Cold drinks can help soothe a sore throat, and soft bulky foods like bread, potatoes and pasta can help keep the throat clean after surgery. It's also important to try your best to keep up with toothbrushing – this may be difficult, but it helps to prevent infection.

You need time to recover

We recommend your child takes plenty of rest indoors during the first few days after surgery. It's best to avoid contact with lots of people during the first week, especially if they have coughs and colds. You should avoid exercise, including swimming.

Will my child have a sore throat?

Sore throats are normal after tonsillectomy for up to 2 weeks. Sore throats are usually worst around day 5 or 6 and steadily start to improve after this. Earaches can also happen, this should resolve as the throat heals.

Pain Relief

You should give your child regular pain relief for the first week, even if they seem comfortable. After this, only give pain relief when it's needed.

Paracetamol and ibuprofen - we recommend you follow the pain relief guidance sheet provided on discharge. Paracetamol can be given 4 times a day, and ibuprofen can be given 3 times a day (with food). These won't be provided by the hospital, so you will need to have plenty at home. Alternating between paracetamol and ibuprofen helps to avoid them both wearing off at the same time. Giving paracetamol about 30 minutes before mealtimes can make eating much more comfortable.

Benzydamine spray – This is a spray for the throat that can be used as a rescue pain killer, just before meals to encourage eating. You may be sent home with a bottle.

Morphine - Your child may be given some liquid morphine (Oramorph) in a bottle to take home. This will have specific dosing instructions and should only be taken if your child is struggling with the pain despite regular paracetamol and ibuprofen. The dose on the dispensing label should not be exceeded and can only be repeated every 6 hours.

What about bleeding after surgery?

The risk of bleeding is highest during the first few days after surgery. During the first week after surgery, 1 in 20 children will have some bleeding that means they need to come back to hospital. 1 in 100 children need another operation to stop the bleeding.

You should go to the Emergency Department if your child brings up red, brown or black vomit, as this might be a sign that the tonsils are bleeding.

I'm worried about an infection

High temperatures over 38°C are an important sign to watch out for after surgery that may suggest that there is an infection. It's normal for the back of the throat to have white patches after surgery – this is part of the healing process. Bad breath is also common, but not concerning. We suggest seeing your GP if you are concerned about an infection so they can decide whether they think it's coming from the tonsils. Only occasionally do children need to come back into hospital for antibiotics after tonsillectomy.

