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Adult and Pediatric E.N.T., Audiology and Hearing Aids

Tonsillectomy with or without Adenoidectomy

Day of surgery:

You or your family member has undergone a tonsillectomy with or without adenoidectomy. Usually in adults only tonsils are removed as the adenoids shrink after adulthood. The surgery itself is very brief, only lasting roughly 15 or 20 minutes. Most patients can expect to spend roughly two hours in the recovery room. Generally a family member will be allowed in the recovery room once the patient is waking up and is aware of their surroundings. Generally this is 30 to 45 minutes. Most patients can expect to spend roughly 1 1/2 to 2 hours in the recovery room after surgery. At this time the patients throat will be numb secondary to anesthetic injected at the time of surgery. This usually will last for three to five hours. Most patients are discharged home after they are fully awake and able to tolerate oral liquids without any nausea or vomiting.

Aftercare:

The primary risks as previously discussed with you or your family are dehydration and bleeding. Dehydration is the biggest concern particularly the first few days. The patient's diet the day of surgery generally is liquids. After that the diet can be as tolerated. General recommendations are soft cool foods, Jell-O, popsicles, applesauce etc.. Avoid citrus or acidic liquids such as orange juice or salty rough foods such as chips and pretzels. Increase the variety of foods taken as the level of pain decreases. The primary importance is adequate hydration.

You will be given prescriptions for liquid medication after surgery. Pain medication generally used is a mixture of Tylenol (acetaminophen) with hydrocodone. Use this as prescribed on the bottle. It is usually best to try and do a scheduled dosage of pain medication the first few days for better pain control. Do not supplement this with regular Tylenol since this could lead to toxic levels. If that pain medication is not adequately controlling the pain, over the counter Advil (ibuprofen) may be dosed between the hydrocodone following the dosing instructions on the bottle. Older children and adults typically will receive a thick liquid topical numbing medication (Magic mouthwash, combination of lidocaine, Mylanta, benedryl) which can be used as a swish and spit or swish and swallow medication. Antibiotics are not routinely given any longer after routine tonsillectomy.

Pain after a tonsillectomy can be quite severe. This can last anywhere from seven to fourteen days. It is not unusual for the pain to be severe the first couple of days and then let up after four or five days and again worsen. It also is very common for patients to have fairly severe ear pain and actually think they have an ear infection. This is actually referred from the tonsillectomy excision site and will resolve as the throat pain improves. Mild throat and ear pain can persist for up to one month. It also is not unusual to have a feeling of a lump in your throat secondary to the uvula swelling. This usually will resolve after a couple of days.

A low-grade fever is fairly common for a few days after surgery. This generally will come down with the prescribed pain medication or Tylenol. Increasing fever is frequently an indicator of inadequate oral intake and dehydration. Usually increasing fluid intake will help resolve this. Fever greater than 102 or persisting for more than four days should be reported to our office

Activity after surgery should be kept to a minimum during the first week. Most people can return to school or work after one week. Any strenuous activity or sports should be curtailed for two weeks. Also patients should not fly or leave town for two weeks.

Bleeding is the primary potential serious risk we are concerned with after surgery. This typically occurs seven to ten days after surgery. This occurs when some of the scabbing sloughs off of the tonsillectomy site. Some mild blood tinged sputum is not unusual the first couple of days but there should not be any bright red bleeding after that. If it occurs gargling with ice water for a few minutes may resolve it, if not please contact our office. Bleeding of any significance is generally very obvious to the patient or family.

Foul breath is a common occurrence after tonsillectomy. This usually will also resolve in approximately 10 days. Mild taste disturbance is also common. Saltwater gargle may be of benefit to improve these.

People who had their tonsils and/or adenoids secondary to enlargement typically will have a change in their voice after surgery. They will sound hypernasal. This generally will resolve within four to six weeks.

Please call our office for a postoperative follow-up roughly three weeks after surgery. Feel free to call with any routine questions during normal business hours. Any emergency questions can also be answered 24/7.

