

Tonsillectomy

What to expect



Information Guide

Tonsillectomy

This guide provides information for Medibank Private Members and their families about tonsillectomy.

It is important that you're well prepared for your healthcare experience, and know what to expect at key stages prior to, during and following this surgery.

It is also important that you discuss your particular circumstances in detail with the healthcare professionals who will be treating and caring for you. You should be confident in the treatment choices you make with your healthcare team, and ensure that they are aware of your individual needs.

The information provided is for general information purposes only and is not a substitute for medical advice. Medibank Private does not recommend or endorse any advice, doctors, other healthcare providers, products, tests, procedures or other general information mentioned in this guide. Reliance on any information provided by Medibank Private is done so at your own risk and Medibank Private takes no responsibility for any injury, loss, damage or other consequences that may result from the use of this information.

The information in this guide does not represent which products or services may be covered under your level of Medibank Private cover. Further, Medibank Private does not pay Benefits for a number of products and services e.g. doctor consultations when not admitted to hospital.

As a member of Medibank Private, your entitlement to Benefits will depend on your type (hospital and/or extras) and level of cover and is subject to our Fund Rules and Policies. Premium rates, Benefits and the Fund Rules and Policies are subject to change from time to time. A copy of our Fund Rules is available at our Retail Centres or at medibank.com.au

Call us on 13 23 31 before you go to hospital to find out what you're covered for, any likely additional costs you may have to pay as well as for any other advice you may need.

The information provided in this guide is current at the time of issue, July 2008.

Tonsillectomy

What is a tonsillectomy?

Tonsillectomy is the surgical removal of the tonsils. The tonsils are two pads of lymphoid (glandular) tissue located on each side at the back of the throat. The tonsils produce antibodies to help to defend against infection entering via the nose or mouth.

Why is a tonsillectomy performed?

A virus, fungal infection or bacteria may cause inflammation or enlargement of the tonsils, leading to the condition known as tonsillitis. While tonsillitis occurs mainly in children, it can occur at any age.

The body's overall ability to fight infection will be maintained despite removal of the tonsils, because the body has other areas of lymphoid tissue which are also able to fight infection.

A tonsillectomy may be performed for a range of conditions including:

- chronic illness due to recurrent infection and enlargement of the tonsils, with difficulties in swallowing and breathing
- very large tonsils that obstruct breathing, cause snoring, mouth breathing and in some cases obstructive sleep apnoea
- recurrent ear infections
- abscesses forming in the throat, also known as quinsy
- frequent incapacity and disruption to daily life
- a tumour or growth on the tonsils

Referral to a specialist

A tonsillectomy is a specialised procedure performed by an ear, nose and throat surgeon. Your GP can recommend and refer you to a suitable specialist with experience in performing tonsillectomies.

As well as advice from your GP, you may wish to know more information about the surgery and what you can expect from your specialist. The following website provides further information about tonsillectomy:

www.healthinsite.gov.au – Australian information provided by the Department of Health and Ageing.

Cost of treatment may also be an important consideration when selecting a specialist. A list of ear, nose and throat surgeons who have participated in Medibank Private's GapCover Scheme in the past can be found on our website, **medibank.com.au**

Note: Specialists can choose to participate in GapCover on a **case-by-case** basis.

More information about GapCover can also be found on our website or in our '*Going to Hospital*' booklet.

What should I discuss with my doctor or specialist?

- discuss the treatment options for your condition and why tonsillectomy is being recommended
- what are the possible outcomes for each of the options you have discussed
- what is the likelihood of each of these outcomes occurring
- why your doctor has recommended a particular specialist in your case
- what experience does the specialist have, for example number of tonsillectomies performed and outcomes for patients, including complication rates
- possible risks and outcomes associated with the procedure
- when any pathology results will be known

- typical recovery time
- arrangements for getting home and after care
- possible further treatment

Ideally, you should make sure that you fully understand the procedure that is going to be performed. Your specialist should explain in detail how the tonsillectomy is done, and what preparation you should make. Your doctor may provide you with written material to read at home.

As tonsillectomy may be recommended for children, you and your specialist should discuss the best way to explain the surgery, preparation and recovery in terms that your child will understand. You may also wish to seek your specialist's advice about approaches to help lessen any anxiety your child may feel about the procedure and hospitalisation.

Your Medibank Private '*Going to Hospital*' booklet contains further questions that you may wish to ask your doctor, including information on obtaining informed financial consent.

Where is it done?

A tonsillectomy is generally performed in either a day surgery or hospital. A tonsillectomy done in hospital may require an overnight admission.

How long will it take?

Time required for the tonsillectomy will vary with individual circumstances, but typically takes approximately 30 minutes plus 30-60 minutes in the procedure recovery area and additional time in hospital for observation and post-procedure care.

Who is involved?

Healthcare professionals usually involved in the procedure are:

- your ear, nose and throat surgeon or in some cases, general practitioner
- an assistant surgeon may assist with the procedure
- an anaesthetist will administer a general anaesthetic
- nurses will assist during the procedure and recovery
- a pathologist may conduct analysis of any specimens collected

How to prepare for the procedure

Your specialist should provide detailed advice on the preparation required in your particular case, including issues which need to be covered to prepare your child, or requirements in respect of adult conditions, for example if you are a smoker or overweight, have high blood pressure, asthma or diabetes.

In general, the person having the tonsillectomy:

- will need to fast (have nothing to eat or drink), for six to eight hours prior to the procedure
- should obtain medical advice about taking prescribed medications prior to the procedure

What happens on arrival at the day surgery centre or hospital?

When you arrive at the day surgery or hospital, you will be admitted. Necessary paperwork will need to be completed.

Prior to the surgery your specialist will ask you to sign a consent form, indicating that you give him or her permission to perform the procedure and that you understand all potential risks and complications.

You will also be examined by the anaesthetist who will care for you during the procedure. He or she should discuss with you your current health status, medications and medication allergies.

What to expect during the tonsillectomy

Preparation for the tonsillectomy includes insertion of an intravenous line usually in the back of the hand for administration of medications and fluid. The anaesthetist will then administer the anaesthetic and the procedure will begin.

During the procedure the person's mouth is held open with a special guard. The surgeon secures the tonsils and then they are removed. Because each tonsil has a substantial blood supply, the blood vessels which were cut during surgery are sealed to minimise post-operative bleeding.

What happens after the tonsillectomy?

The person will wake up in a recovery area where they will continue to be closely monitored by nursing staff until they have fully recovered from the anaesthetic. During recovery, pain relief will be administered as required.

Whether the person is going home that day or staying overnight, it will be necessary for a friend or relative to accompany them when they leave, and to spend the first night at home with them. Adult patients should not drive for at least a day after the procedure.

The day surgery or hospital will give you specific instructions about any side effects which can be expected, and any symptoms for which further assistance should be sought. After surgery the following may be expected:

- sore throat. For children, swallowing may cause pain for 4 or 5 days, in adults discomfort may last up to 10 days
- mild ear-ache, sore tongue, gums and jaw may be experienced
- a small amount (if any) of bleeding from the tonsil area

Your specialist will advise you about resuming eating and drinking after the operation, managing pain relief and other aspects of care once you are at home.



Phone

13 23 31

Email

ask_us@medibank.com.au

Visit Us

medibank.com.au

Write To Us

Medibank Private GPO Box 9999, in your capital city

Contact Us

Call us on 13 23 31 or visit medibank.com.au for your nearest Retail Centre

The information contained in this guide is current at the time of issue, July 2008, and supersedes all previously published material.
Medibank Private Limited ABN 47 080 890 259. MPLM17341107