

**Consult your doctor to ensure that this information is right for your child. Information below is for general information and does not constitute medical advice.**

## **What is tonsillitis?**

Tonsillitis is an infection or inflammation of the tonsils [Click here to see an illustration..](#) The tonsils are balls of lymphatic tissue on either side of the throat, above and behind the tongue, that are part of the immune system.

## **What causes tonsillitis?**

Most often, tonsillitis is caused by a virus. Less frequently, it is caused by a bacterium, such as the one that also causes strep throat. In rare instances, tonsillitis can also be caused by fungi or parasites.

## **What are the symptoms?**

The main symptom of tonsillitis is a sore throat, which usually appears red and inflamed along with the tonsils [Click here to see an illustration..](#) The tonsils may have spots on them or pus that covers them in patches or entirely. Fever is also common.

When sore throat from an infection of the tonsils is associated with coldlike symptoms, such as runny nose, nasal congestion, sneezing, and coughing, a virus is most likely the cause.

When the sore throat is accompanied by a sudden and severe fever and swollen lymph nodes [Click here to see an illustration.](#), the infection is more likely bacterial. If you have these symptoms, you should see a health professional to be tested for strep throat. Abdominal pain and headache can also indicate a bacterial infection.

## **How is tonsillitis diagnosed?**

Tonsillitis is diagnosed by a visual examination of the throat. Red and swollen tonsils with spots or sores can indicate tonsillitis.

A rapid strep test can be conducted in a doctor's office along with a throat culture to determine whether the tonsillitis is caused by streptococcus bacteria. If you have symptoms characteristic of strep throat (sore throat, fever, and swollen lymph nodes), you should be tested for strep.

An accurate history of throat infections is necessary to determine whether the tonsillitis is chronic, which affects the choice of appropriate treatment.

A test for mononucleosis may be done if the Epstein-Barr virus (which can cause mononucleosis) is suspected as a cause of the infection.

## **How is it treated?**

Tonsillitis will usually go away on its own if left untreated.

If the infection is viral, treatment focuses on managing symptoms. Gargling with salt water, drinking warm tea, and using other home treatment measures can help relieve discomfort. Nonprescription pain relievers, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) may also be used by adults and children 6 months and older. Aspirin should not be given to anyone age 20 years or younger because of its link to Reye's syndrome.

If tonsillitis is determined to be caused by the strep throat bacterium, your health professional will prescribe antibiotic medication.

Surgical removal of the tonsils (tonsillectomy) is generally only recommended as treatment for tonsillitis when a child has serious complications, recurrent infections, or chronic infections that do not respond to treatment and interfere with daily functioning. However, tonsillectomy should only be performed after careful consideration of your child's medical history and overall health by you and your child's doctor.