Tonsillectomy

A tonsillectomy is a surgical procedure to remove the tonsils. The tonsils are two clusters of tissue located on both sides of the back of the throat. Tonsils are often removed when they become enlarged and block the upper airway, which can lead to difficulty breathing. They are also removed when recurrence of tonsil infections (tonsillitis) or strep throat cannot be successfully treated by antibiotics.

A tonsillectomy can treat medical conditions, including:
• Frequent and loud snoring
• Periods when you stop breathing during sleep or sleep apnea
• Cancer of the tonsils
• Breathing problems related to swollen tonsils
• Bleeding of the tonsils
• Trouble swallowing chewy foods, especially meats

Information about your procedure:
A tonsillectomy is an outpatient surgical procedure that is performed under general anesthesia. When you wake up after the procedure, you'll be in a recovery room. Normally you will remain at the hospital for several hours after surgery for observation. Most patients will go home the same day after a successful tonsillectomy.

Things to know when you go home:
Drinking: Liquids are strongly encouraged. Avoid any acidic liquids (tomato juice, lemon juice, orange juice).

Eating: You may eat soft foods such as cream potatoes, soups, liquids of all types (except acids), Jell-O, ice cream, puddings, soft scrambled eggs, soft cooked cereals, etc.

Nausea/Vomiting: Some patients may experience nausea and vomiting after surgery. This usually occurs within the first 24 hours and resolves on its own after the effects of anesthesia wear off. Contact your doctor with signs of dehydration (less than 240ml/cc or 8oz of urine in 8 hours). For nausea, contact your doctor’s office for a prescription.

Fever: Temperature up to 100 degrees is normal. If your temperature goes any higher, it is most likely you are not drinking enough fluids. Contact your doctor if you develop a fever greater than 101.5.
Activity: Activity should be kept to a minimum for the first 5 days and increased slowly. Patients can usually return to work after normal eating and drinking resumes and pain medication is no longer required, with the approval of your doctor.

Scabs: A scab will form where the tonsils were removed. These scabs are thick, white, and can cause bad breath. This is normal, and most scabs will fall off in pieces on the sixth or seventh day following surgery. Some bleeding can be expected at this time. If you experience red bleeding, attempt to gargle with ice water. Otherwise, do not gargle but rinse your mouth with warm salt/soda rinses (mix 1 teaspoon salt, 1 teaspoon soda, and 1,000cc warm water).

Bleeding: Minimum amount of bleeding may occur during the first 5 days. If hemorrhage or vomiting of bright red blood does occur, go immediately to the UAB Emergency Room. Be sure to notify the ENT resident on call at (205) 934-3411.

Pain control: For pain, take Tylenol Elixir or your prescription medications as instructed by your doctor. Contact your doctor if your pain is not well-controlled or if side effects are suspected.

Breathing: Snoring and mouth breathing may be noticed due to swelling in the throat. Breathing should return to normal when swelling subsides in 10-14 days after surgery. If you experience difficulty breathing, go to the Emergency Room or call 911.