Adenoids
Summary

- The adenoids are lymph nodes located in the throat behind the nose.
- Infected adenoids can cause other health problems, including middle ear infections, sinusitis and difficulty with breathing, especially at night.
- Infected adenoids are rarely treated by themselves. Treatment is determined by the other health problems caused by the infected adenoids.

The adenoids are lymph nodes located in the back of the throat behind the nose. Lymph nodes make up part of the lymphatic system, which helps the immune system to fight infection. Other lymph nodes are located in many places, including the neck, armpits, chest, abdomen and groin. Along with the tonsils, they form part of the 'first line of defence', which protects the body from infections. Airborne germs entering the body via the nose are filtered and trapped by hairs and mucous in the nose and then most are destroyed by antibodies and white cells made by the adenoids.

In adults, both tonsils and adenoids shrink. However, they can all swell up again with infections.

Swollen adenoids can block the nose

Since adenoids are constantly in the path of germs (micro-organisms), infections are common. Infected adenoids swell, which can reduce the airflow through the nose. Symptoms of infected adenoids include:

- breathing through the mouth
- snoring when asleep
- talking with a 'blocked nose' sound
- the inability to pronounce certain consonants, including 'm' and 'n'
- dry and sore throat because of breathing through the mouth (this is often a problem in the morning after sleeping with the mouth open)
- yellow or green mucous coming from the nose.

Complications of infected adenoids

Infections of the adenoids can cause a variety of complications, including:

- **Middle ear infections** - the adenoids are right at the end of the tubes from the middle ear to the throat (the Eustachian tubes). Infections can spread up to the ears from the adenoids and cause middle ear infections, which can affect hearing.
- **Glue ear** - the swollen adenoids block the Eustachian tubes and prevent the normal mucous, which is made each day in the middle ear, from draining away. A build-up of sticky mucous interferes with the movements of the tiny bones in the middle ear, affecting hearing.
- **Sinusitis** - the air-filled cavities of the skull may also become infected.
- **Chest infections** - bacteria or viruses can infect other sites, such as the bronchi (bronchitis) or lungs (pneumonia).
- **Vomiting** - the child may swallow a great deal of pus, generally at night while sleeping, which may be vomited in the morning.

Treatment for infected adenoids

What is done to treat infected adenoids depends on whether the child is ill or not, and what other effects the infected adenoids are causing. For example, if a child has a middle ear infection or sinusitis, and the adenoids are swollen, treatment will be aimed at reducing the pain in the ears. Antibiotics will often be used. If these treatments improve the health of the ear or the sinuses, they will usually help get rid of the infection in the adenoids as well. It is rare for 'infected adenoids' to be the main reason for treatment.

Your doctor may recommend having the adenoids removed (adenoidectomy) if:

- your child has recurrent ear infections, which are interfering with language development
- your child is often unwell
- your child, or an older person, has large adenoids that are interfering with breathing, especially at night.

Adenoidectomy

Surgery to remove the adenoids is done under general anaesthetic. Often, the tonsils are removed at the same time, since recurring infections tend to affect both the adenoids and tonsils. Post-operative complications may include vomiting, difficulties with swallowing, pain and bleeding.

Where to get help
Things to remember

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- Infected adenoids are rarely treated by themselves. Treatment is determined by the other health problems caused by the infected adenoids.

References


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More information

Ear nose and throat

The following content is displayed as Tabs. Once you have activated a link navigate to the end of the list to view its associated content. The activated link is defined as Active Tab

- Ear basics
- Ear conditions
- Hearing loss
- Nose conditions
- Throat conditions

Ear basics

- Ear problems in children
  Babies and young children are more likely to develop middle ear infections because they are still building up their immunity...
- Ears
  The brain uses the inner ear, the eyes and muscles to pinpoint the position of the body at all times...
- Ear wax
  In most cases, blockage of the ear canal with wax is a harmless event...

Ear conditions

- Acoustic neuroma
  In its earlier stages, an acoustic neuroma can present similar symptoms to other, less serious conditions, which may delay diagnosis and treatment...
- Dizziness and vertigo
  Dizziness is generally treatable and rarely indicates serious brain disease...
- Ear infections
  It is estimated that around four out of five children will experience a middle ear infection at least once...
- Ears - Meniere's disease
  Meniere's disease affects the ear, which is the centre of hearing and balance...
- Ears - otosclerosis
  Otosclerosis eventually affects both ears, but the condition doesn't cause total deafness...
- Labyrinthitis and vestibular neuritis
  Labyrinthitis and vestibular neuritis are disorders that result in inflammation of the inner ear and the nerve connecting the inner ear to the brain...
- Middle ear infections
  Middle ear infections often happen during or after a child has a cold...
- Swimmer's ear
  Swimmer's ear can be triggered by exposure to water or mechanical damage due to overzealous cleaning...

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• **Tinnitus**
  
  Tinnitus cannot be cured, but it can be managed with some lifestyle changes...

**Hearing loss**

• **Deafness - a range of causes**
  
  Deafness is caused by many different events including injury, disease and genetic defects...

• **Fats - ways to protect your hearing**
  
  Once hearing is damaged, it often can't be restored...

• **Hearing loss - auditory neuropathy**
  
  Auditory neuropathy is hearing loss caused by a disruption of nerve impulses travelling from the inner ear to the brain...

• **Hearing loss - communication in the workplace**
  
  If you are unsure how to best communicate with a colleague who has a hearing impairment, ask them...

• **Hearing loss - how it affects people**
  
  Many people with hearing loss experience a drop in self-esteem and confidence because of their impaired ability to communicate...

• **Hearing loss - lipreading**
  
  Lipreading can help people who are hearing impaired to cope better with their hearing loss...

• **Hearing problems - hyperacusis**
  
  Reduced sound tolerance can confine a person to their home, affect their career and social life, and make everyday activities impossible...

• **Hearing problems in children**
  
  The earlier that hearing loss is identified in children, the better for the child's language, learning and overall development...

• **Hearing tests**
  
  A ringing sensation in the ears (tinnitus), or people complaining that you talk too loudly are signs you may need to have your hearing checked...

• **Sign language - Auslan**
  
  Like any language, Auslan continues to evolve to meet the communication needs of people who are deaf...

**Nose conditions**

• **Adenoids**
  
  Since adenoids are constantly in the path of germs, infections are common...

• **Anosmia - loss of smell**
  
  People are less sensitive to smells the older they get, and women tend to have a more acute sense of smell than men...

• **Nosebleeds**
  
  Bleeding from the nose is common in children and is usually not severe or serious...

• **Polyps**
  
  Nasal polyps can sometimes interfere with breathing...

• **Sinusitis**
  
  If you suffer from sinusitis, it's important to see if there is any trigger which can be treated...

**Throat conditions**

• **Croup**
  
  Croup is a viral infection of the throat and windpipe that causes noisy breathing, a hoarse voice and a harsh, barking cough...

• **Larynx**
  
  Prolonged exposure to air pollutants, such as dust, can irritate the larynx and cause chronic laryngitis...

• **Rheumatic fever**
  
  Untreated rheumatic fever can lead to serious complications such as rheumatic heart disease...
Sleep apnoea
A person with sleep apnoea may wake hundreds of times every night.

Streptococcal infection - group A
Streptococcal infection - group A can cause sore throats (pharyngitis), scarlet fever or impetigo (school sores).

Throat cancer
Risk factors for throat cancer include smoking and heavy alcohol consumption.

Tonsillitis
Because most attacks of tonsillitis are caused by viruses, most of the treatment is aimed at helping to relieve the symptoms.

Related Information

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Home

Related information on other websites

- Child and Youth Health - Parenting and Child Health.

Content Partner
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