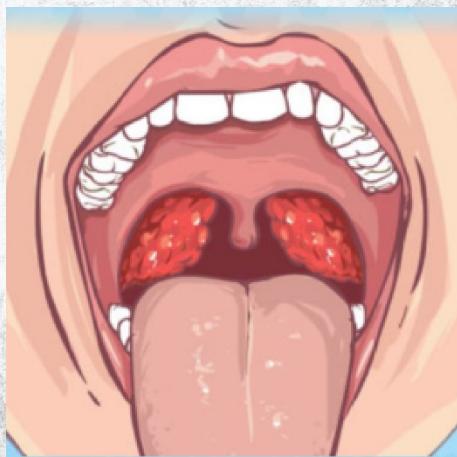


# Tonsillitis



## What are the tonsils and what is their role?

The tonsils are the immune system's first line of defense against bacteria and viruses that enter your mouth. This function may make the tonsils particularly vulnerable to infection and inflammation. However, the tonsil's immune system function declines after puberty — a factor that may account for the rare cases of tonsillitis in adults.

## What is tonsillitis?

Tonsillitis is inflammation of the tonsils, two oval-shaped pads of tissue at the back of the throat — one tonsil on each side. Signs and symptoms of tonsillitis include swollen tonsils, sore throat, difficulty swallowing and tender lymph nodes on the sides of the neck.

Most cases of tonsillitis are caused by infection with a common virus, but bacterial infections also may cause tonsillitis.

Because appropriate treatment for tonsillitis depends on the cause, it's important to get a prompt and accurate diagnosis. Surgery to remove tonsils, once a common procedure



to treat tonsillitis, is usually performed only when tonsillitis occurs frequently, doesn't respond to other treatments or causes serious complications.

## Symptoms

Tonsillitis most commonly affects children between preschool ages and the mid teenage years. Common signs and symptoms of tonsillitis include:

- Red, swollen tonsils
- White or yellow coating or patches on the tonsils
- Sore throat
- Difficult or painful swallowing
- Fever
- Enlarged, tender glands (lymph nodes) in the neck
- A scratchy, muffled or throaty voice
- Bad breath
- Stomachache
- Neck pain or stiff neck
- Headache



In young children who are unable to describe how they feel, signs of tonsillitis may include:

- Drooling due to difficult or painful swallowing
- Refusal to eat
- Unusual fussiness

**Call your doctor if** your child is experiencing:

- A sore throat with fever
- A sore throat that doesn't go away within 24 to 48 hours
- Painful or difficult swallowing
- Extreme weakness, fatigue or fussiness

**Get immediate care if** your child has any of these signs:

- Difficulty breathing
- Extreme difficulty swallowing
- Excessive drooling

## Causes

Tonsillitis is most often caused by common viruses, but bacterial infections also can be the cause.

## Risk factors

Risk factors for tonsillitis include:

- **Young age.** Tonsillitis most often affects children, and tonsillitis caused by bacteria is most common in children ages 5 to 15.



- **Frequent exposure to germs.** School-age children are in close contact with their peers and frequently exposed to viruses or bacteria that can cause tonsillitis.

## Complications

Inflammation or swelling of the tonsils from frequent or ongoing (chronic) tonsillitis can cause complications such as:

- Disrupted breathing during sleep (obstructive sleep apnea)
- Infection that spreads deep into surrounding tissue (tonsillar cellulitis)
- Infection that results in a collection of pus behind a tonsil (peritonsillar abscess)

