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Adenoids

What are adenoids?

Adenoids are a patch of tissue that is high up in the throat, just behind the nose. They, along with the tonsils, are part of the lymphatic system. The lymphatic system clears away infection and keeps body fluids in balance. The adenoids and tonsils work by trapping germs coming in through the mouth and nose.

Adenoids usually start to shrink after about age 5. By the teenage years, they are almost completely gone. By then, the body has other ways to fight germs.

What are enlarged adenoids?

Enlarged adenoids are adenoids that are swollen. It is a common problem in children.

What causes enlarged adenoids?

Your child's adenoids can be enlarged, or swollen, for different reasons. It may just be that your child had enlarged adenoids at birth. Adenoids can also become enlarged when they are trying to fight off an infection. They might stay enlarged even after the infection is gone.

What problems can enlarged adenoids cause?

Enlarged adenoids can make it hard to breathe through the nose. Your child might end up breathing only through the mouth. This may cause:

- A dry mouth [<https://medlineplus.gov/drymouth.html>] , which can also lead to bad breath [<https://medlineplus.gov/badbreath.html>]
- Cracked lips
- A runny nose

Other problems that enlarged adenoids can cause include:

- Loud breathing
- Snoring [<https://medlineplus.gov/snoring.html>]
- Restless sleep
- Sleep apnea [<https://medlineplus.gov/sleepapnea.html>] , a disorder that causes you to repeatedly stop breathing during sleep
- Ear infections [<https://medlineplus.gov/earinfections.html>]

How can enlarged adenoids be diagnosed?

To find out if your child has enlarged adenoids, the health care provider will:

- Ask about your child's medical history, including asking about your child's symptoms
- Check your child's ears, throat, and mouth
- Feel your child's neck

Since the adenoids are higher up than the throat, the provider cannot see them just by looking through your child's mouth. To check the size of your child's adenoids, your provider may use:

- A special mirror in the mouth
- A long, flexible tube with a light (an endoscope)
- An x-ray [<https://medlineplus.gov/xrays.html>]

What are the treatments for enlarged adenoids?

The treatment depends on what is causing the problem. If the symptoms are not too bad, your child may not need treatment. If treatment is needed, your child may get nasal spray to reduce the swelling or antibiotics if the provider thinks that there is a bacterial infection.

In some cases, your child may need an adenoidectomy.

What is an adenoidectomy and why might I my child need one?

An adenoidectomy is surgery to remove the adenoids. The provider may recommend this surgery if:

- Your child has repeated infections of the adenoids. Sometimes the infections can also cause ear infections and fluid buildup in the middle ear.
- Taking antibiotics doesn't get rid of a bacterial infection of the adenoids.
- The enlarged adenoids block the airways.

If there is also a problem with the tonsils, your child will probably have a tonsillectomy (removal of the tonsils) at the same time that the adenoids are removed.

After having the surgery, your child usually goes home the same day. Your child will probably have some throat pain, bad breath, and a runny nose. It can take several days to feel all better.

Start Here

- Enlarged Adenoids [<https://familydoctor.org/condition/enlarged-adenoids/?adfree=true>] (American Academy of Family Physicians)
- Tonsils and Adenoids [<https://www.enthealth.org/conditions/tonsils-and-adenoids/>]  (American Academy of Otolaryngology--Head and Neck Surgery)

Diagnosis and Tests

- X-Ray Exam: Neck [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/xray-neck.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/xray-neck.html>]

Treatments and Therapies

- Adenoid removal - series [https://medlineplus.gov/ency/presentations/100076_1.htm] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/esp_presentations/100076_1.htm]

Related Issues

- Obstructive Sleep Apnea [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/obstructive-sleep-apnea/symptoms-causes/syc-20352090?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/obstructive-sleep-apnea/symptoms-causes/syc-20352090?p=1>]
- Tonsillitis: MedlinePlus Health Topic [<https://medlineplus.gov/tonsillitis.html>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/tonsillitis.html>]

Clinical Trials

- ClinicalTrials.gov: Adenoid Disorders [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Adenoids%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)

Journal Articles

References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)

- Article: Pediatric adenoidectomy is safe surgery with a low complication rate: a... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40745469>]
- Article: The effect of adenoid hypertrophy on growth-development level and dental maturation:... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40721764>]
- Article: Effects of Intranasal dexmedetomidine and esketamine for premedication on postoperative pain... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40597601>]
- Adenoids -- see more articles [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%22Adenoids%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+OR+%22Adenoideectomy%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+AND+humans%5Bmh%5D+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND+%22last+1+Year%22+%5Bedat%5D+NOT+%28letter%5Bpt%5D+OR+case+reports%5Bpt%5D+OR+editorial%5Bpt%5D+OR+comment%5Bpt%5D%29+AND+free+full+text%5Bsb%5D+>]

Find an Expert

- American Academy of Otolaryngology--Head and Neck Surgery [<https://www.entnet.org/>]
- Find an ENT (Ear, Nose, and Throat Specialist) [<https://www.enthealth.org/find-ent/>] (American Academy of Otolaryngology--Head and Neck Surgery)

Children

- Adenoids and Adenoideectomy (For Parents) [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/adenoids.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/adenoids.html>]
- What Are Adenoids? [<https://kidshealth.org/en/kids/adenoids.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/kids/adenoids.html>]

Teenagers

- Adenoids and Adenoideectomy [<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/adenoids.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/teens/adenoids.html>]

Patient Handouts

- Adenoid removal [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003011.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/003011.htm>]
- Enlarged adenoids [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001649.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/001649.htm>]
- Tonsil and adenoid removal - discharge [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000155.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000155.htm>]



Adenoid removal [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003011.htm>]

Adenoid removal - series [https://medlineplus.gov/ency/presentations/100076_1.htm]

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Tonsil and adenoid removal - discharge [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000155.htm>]

Related Health Topics

Mouth Disorders [<https://medlineplus.gov/mouthdisorders.html>]

Tonsillitis [<https://medlineplus.gov/tonsillitis.html>]

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