

When is your child's snoring serious?

Childhood snoring is often the result of enlarged tonsils and adenoids. Tonsils and adenoids are masses of tissue that are similar to the lymph nodes or "glands" found in the neck, groin, and armpits. Tonsils are the two masses in the back of the mouth, on each side of the palate. Adenoids are up high in the throat, where the back part of the nose meets the throat. Both tonsils and adenoids "sample" bacteria and viruses, and assist in developing the body's immune system. This process occurs primarily in the first few years of life, and therefore, children who must have their tonsils and adenoids removed suffer no loss in their resistance.

Childhood snoring in itself is not of serious concern. However, when breathing stops for a few seconds at night during snoring, known as "apnea", then you should see your child's doctor. Such obstruction can affect your child's behavior, attention span, and ability to learn in school. Even some forms of bedwetting can be attributed to enlarged tonsils and adenoids. Some orthodontists believe chronic mouth breathing from large tonsils and adenoids causes malformations of the face and improper alignment of the teeth. "Other symptoms associated with snoring that should alert you to see your child's physician or an ENT physician are recurrent throat infections or recurrent ear infections (ear infections can occur due to blockage of ear drainage into the back of the throat from enlarged adenoids)", says Dr. Pandit.

How are tonsil and adenoid diseases treated?

Bacterial infections of the tonsils, especially those caused by streptococcus ("strep throat"), are first treated with antibiotics. However, excessive tonsil and adenoid enlargement, resulting in any or all of the symptoms described above, may require surgical removal by an Ear, Nose, & Throat surgeon.

The removal of tonsils and adenoids is known as tonsillectomy and adenoidectomy. This is a 30-60 minute procedure that in most cases can be performed as outpatient surgery, with the ability to go home the same day after surgery. The most common postoperative symptoms include throat pain, ear pain, fever, and vomiting. Rarely, there is a chance of bleeding between 3-14 days after surgery as the throat heals, in which case your surgeon should be notified immediately. "The success rate from this surgery is very high in treating the child's preoperative symptoms. In fact, many parents remark that their children sleep longer for the first few months after surgery, which can be attributed to the deeper, better quality sleep that these children can attain" comments Dr. Pandit.

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