

Don't hurry to take tonsils out

Question: My 5-year-old son has had swollen tonsils, on and off, for years.

I have heard both good and bad results regarding removing and not removing his tonsils. What is your advice?

Answer: It is a misunderstanding and folklore to believe that tonsils are not necessary glands in our bodies and it is fine to remove them if they get swollen often. Your tonsils act as one of your first lines of defense against infection. Tonsillitis or infection of the tonsils, is a sign that they are overactive and fighting an invading organism. Many times removing the protective gland has nothing to do with the cause of why it is swollen. Removing the tonsils or a tonsillectomy was a common training surgery for medical student learning surgery. This increased its removal statistics in the past.

Modern research and better understanding of the function of the tonsils has slightly reduced the old practice of immediately removing chronically infected tonsils. Even so, tonsillectomies are the most widely performed operation for children under the age of 15. Even though the number has declined steadily in recent years, there are still approximately 250,000 performed a year.

Some surgeries definitely fall into the "Over-prescribed and often unnecessary" category. Among them; hysterectomies, Caesarian sections, myringotomy (ear tubes) and tonsillectomy.

Dutch researchers discovered that children receiving tonsillectomies enjoy only a minimum reduction in symptoms. This doesn't sound worth the risk.

Prior to agreeing to a tonsillectomy, it's a good idea to have your child checked for spinal subluxations, particularly in the cervical spine (c5 vertebra) area. Subluxations prevent the body from fighting infection and inhibit your immune system. You never want to remove something that is better off left in place.

Quote of the week: *"Life is what happens to us while we are making other plans."* – Thomas la Mance