

Tonsillitis



Overview

This condition is an infection of the tonsils (the large lymph glands at the back of the throat). Tonsils normally help protect against infection, but they can become overwhelmed by viruses or bacteria. Tonsillitis occurs most often in children and rarely in adults.

Causes

Tonsillitis is most commonly caused by a viral infection. In many cases, the viruses that infect the tonsils are the same viruses that cause the common cold. Tonsillitis can also be caused by bacterial infections. The most common bacterial culprit is *Streptococcus*, the bacteria that causes strep throat.

Symptoms

Symptoms of tonsillitis include large, red, swollen, tonsils that may be covered with white spots. The throat may be sore and the jaw may be tender. The person may experience difficulty when swallowing and hoarseness when speaking. Tonsillitis may be accompanied by fever, chills, ear pain and headache.

Treatment

Treatment depends on the type and the severity of the infection. Treatment may include antibiotics (for bacterial infections), adequate rest and drinking lots of fluids. The person may drink warm fluids such as broth or tea with honey. The person may also drink cold fluids, such as slushes, or eat popsicles. Other options include gargling with warm salt water, sucking on lozenges, and using a humidifier to keep the air moist. Fever may be treated with acetaminophen or ibuprofen. A person who suffers from repeated infections may benefit from a tonsillectomy (surgical removal of the tonsils).