

## Deciding what to do about recurrent sore throat

This short decision aid is for children and young people with recurrent sore throat aged 16 years and under, and their parents or carers. It is to help people decide what treatment to choose for recurrent sore throat. This is when children keep getting a sore throat that stops them from doing normal everyday things like going to school. You can use it on your own, or with your doctor, to help you make a decision about what's right for you or your child at this time.

There are two main options for treating recurrent sore throat. These are:

• **Active observation.** This may mean having regular check-ups with your doctor, and having antibiotics if needed.

• **Surgery.** This means having an operation to remove your tonsils (small round glands at the back of your throat behind your tongue). You may also have an operation to remove your adenoids (small lumps of tissue at the back of the nose).

## What are my options?

	Active observation	Surgery
<b>What is the treatment?</b>	<p>Active observation is where your doctor regularly monitors your recurrent sore throat to check if it gets better or worse, and how often it comes back.</p> <p>If your sore throat is caused by bacteria, your doctor may prescribe you antibiotics. These are tablets or drops that you swallow which can help kill off bacteria. You will need to take them several times a day for around 10 days.[1] Antibiotics won't help if your sore throat is caused by a virus.</p>	<p>Surgery for recurrent sore throat is having an operation to remove your tonsils (small round glands at the back of your throat behind your tongue). This is called a tonsillectomy. You may also have an operation to remove your adenoids (small lumps of tissue at the back of the nose). This is called an adenoidectomy. An operation to remove both your tonsils and your adenoids is called an adenotonsillectomy.</p> <p>You may get recurrent sore throat because your tonsils or adenoids keep getting infected. Having surgery to remove your tonsils or adenoids can stop them from getting infected. This may help to stop you from getting recurrent sore throat.</p>

	Active observation	Surgery
<b>What is the effect on how likely you are to have another sore throat?</b>	<p>Children who have active observation are likely to have fewer sore throats, over time. In one group of children who had active observation for two years, the average number of sore throats fell from eight in a year to four in a year.[2]</p> <p>Children who have active observation may have antibiotics as part of their treatment, to help the symptoms of sore throat. Antibiotics probably won't make a difference to how likely a child is to have another sore throat.[3]</p>	<p>Children who have surgery are likely to have fewer sore throats.[4] Children who have surgery for severe recurrent sore throat have, on average, between three and four fewer sore throats in the year after surgery than in the year before.[5][6]</p> <p>Surgery is more likely to prevent another sore throat in children who have had three or more sore throats in the past year.[7]</p>

	Active observation	Surgery
<b>What is the effect on how long your sore throat is likely to last?</b>	<p>Having active observation without antibiotics won't affect how long a sore throat will last.</p> <p>A sore throat usually clears up on its own. Around 82 in 100 children who don't have treatment for their sore throat have no symptoms after one week.[8]</p> <p>It's possible to have antibiotics as part of active observation, if it's likely a sore throat is caused by bacteria. This may mean having antibiotics for one sore throat and not for another.</p> <p>Having antibiotics may reduce how long a sore throat lasts by around 16 hours compared with not having antibiotics.[9]</p> <p>Antibiotics may reduce the amount of pain and fever from a sore throat by about half after three days of taking them. [10]</p>	<p>We don't know if having surgery will affect how long a sore throat will last.</p>

	Active observation	Surgery
<b>What is the effect on how much time will you have to spend having treatment?</b>	<p>You won't have to spend time having treatment if you choose to wait and see if your symptoms go away.</p> <p>If you have antibiotics, you will need to take them several times a day for around 10 days.[11]</p>	<p>You will have to spend time in hospital if you choose to have surgery. The operation to remove the tonsils takes around 45 minutes. The operation to remove the tonsils and adenoids takes around 1 hour and 15 minutes. You can usually go home the same day you have surgery. You may need to stay overnight.</p> <p>Some people need to go back to hospital for further treatment after having surgery. Around 4 in 100 people go back to hospital within 28 days of having surgery. [12]</p>

	Active observation	Surgery
<b>What is the effect on how likely you are to miss days off school?</b>	<p>Taking antibiotics for a sore throat is unlikely to reduce the number of days missed from school compared with not taking antibiotics.[13]</p>	<p>Having surgery may mean missing fewer school days because of a sore throat.[14]</p>

	Active observation	Surgery
<b>What side effects or complications does the treatment have?</b>	<p>Having active observation without antibiotics won't cause side effects.</p> <p>Having antibiotics may cause side effects, such as an upset stomach, diarrhoea, and a rash. Taking antibiotics too often may make bacteria resistant to antibiotics so they don't work anymore.</p>	<p>Having surgery can cause side effects. Around 14 in 100 children who have surgery for recurrent sore throat have problems after the operation.[15] About 3 in 100 will have problems with bleeding after surgery.</p> <p>Some people feel dizzy and sick when they wake up after surgery. Some people feel pain in their neck and throat that can last for up to two weeks after surgery.</p>

	Active observation	Surgery
<b>What is the effect on how likely you are to need other treatments?</b>	<p>It's possible to take antibiotics if a sore throat is caused by bacteria.</p> <p>Painkillers can help a painful sore throat or a fever.[16] How likely you are to need painkillers may depend on how severe the pain or fever is.</p>	<p>It's possible to take painkillers for pain and fever after surgery.[17] How likely you are to need painkillers may depend on how severe the pain or fever is.</p>

## What are the pros and cons of each option?

People with recurrent sore throat, and their parents or carers, have different experiences about the health problem and views on treatment. Choosing the treatment option that is best for the patient means considering how the consequences of each treatment option will affect their life.

Here are some questions people may want to consider about treatment for recurrent sore throat:

- Do their symptoms of recurrent sore throat stop them from doing normal everyday things?
- Are they willing to wait and see if their symptoms get better?
- Is the most important thing to have a treatment that means they are less bothered by a sore throat?
- Are they willing to take the risk of side effects or complications from treatment?
- Do they want a treatment that means they are less likely to miss days off school?
- Are they willing to consider having an operation?

## How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?

Go to <http://sdm.rightcare.nhs.uk/pda/recurrent-sore-throat/> for more detailed information about treatments for **Recurrent Sore Throat**. People using this type of information say they understand the health problem and treatment choices more clearly, and why one treatment is better for them than another. They also say they can talk more confidently about their reasons for liking or not liking an option with health professionals, friends and family.

## References

References can be viewed online at <http://sdm.rightcare.nhs.uk/pda/recurrent-sore-throat/references/>