

# Peritonsillar Abscess: What You Should Know

## What is a peritonsillar abscess?

A peritonsillar abscess (per-ih-TON-sih-lar AB-sess) is an infection that forms near one of the tonsils in the soft, spongy part of the roof of your mouth. An abscess means that pus has formed around the infection. Most abscesses are caused by complications of a tonsil infection. You can also get an abscess from infectious mononucleosis (also called mono) or from tooth or gum infections. People who smoke are also more likely to get abscesses.

## How can I tell if I have one?

The most common symptom is a bad sore throat that seems to be worse on one side. You may also have a fever, trouble swallowing, or trouble opening your mouth very wide. It may be hard to speak, or you may only be able to speak in a very soft voice. Call your doctor right away if you have trouble breathing, swallowing, or talking, or if you start to drool.

## How is it treated?

The pus will need to be removed. Your doctor can drain the pus in several ways. First, he or

she will give you a shot to numb the skin around the abscess. Then, he or she will either take the pus out with a needle or make a small cut in the abscess so the pus can drain out. Surgery to remove your tonsils is also an option. You will probably need surgery only if you have had several tonsil infections or an abscess before.

After the pus is gone, the pain should get better. You may have to take antibiotics to make sure the infection completely goes away. Your doctor may also give you medicine for the pain.

## Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

AAFP's Patient Information Resource

<http://familydoctor.org/familydoctor/en/diseases-conditions/peritonsillar-abscess.html>

National Library of Medicine

<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000986.htm>

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**This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.**

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