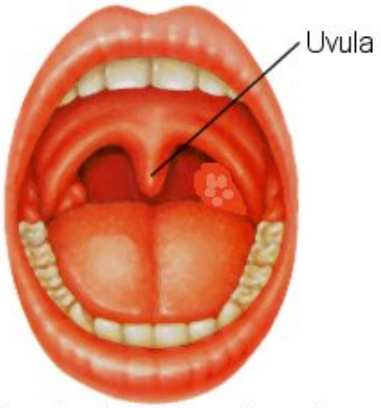
Peritonsillar Abscess

A peritonsillar abscess is a collection of pus located in the back of the throat behind the tonsils. It usually occurs when a streptococcal infection of the throat or tonsils spreads into the space around the tonsils. They are almost always caused by the streptococcal germ (bacteria). The treatment of a peritonsillar abscess is most often drainage accomplished by putting a needle into the abscess or cutting (incising) and draining the abscess. This is most often followed with a course of antibiotics.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS



Tonsils - left side enlarged with peritonsillar abscess

- If your abscess was drained by your caregiver today, rinse your throat (gargle) with warm salt water four times per day or as needed for comfort. Do not swallow this mixture. Mix 1 teaspoon of salt in 8 ounces of warm water for gargling.
- Rest in bed as needed. Resume activities as able.
- Apply cold to your neck for pain relief. Fill a plastic bag with ice and wrap it in a towel. Hold the ice on your neck for 20 minutes 4 times per day.
- Eat a soft or liquid diet as tolerated while your throat remains sore. Popsicles and ice cream may be good early choices. Drinking plenty of cold fluids will probably be soothing and help take swelling down in between the warm gargles.
- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver. Do not use aspirin unless directed by your physician. Aspirin slows down the clotting process. It can also cause bleeding from the drainage area if this was needled or incised today.
- If antibiotics were prescribed, take them as directed for the full course of the prescription. Even if you feel you are well, you need to take them.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have increased pain, swelling, redness, or drainage in your throat.
- An oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C) develops, or as your caregiver suggests.
- You develop signs of infection such as dizziness, headache, lethargy, or generalized feelings of illness.
- You have difficulty breathing, swallowing or eating.
- You show signs of becoming dehydrated (lightheadedness when standing, decreased urine output, a fast heart rate, or dry mouth and mucous membranes).

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You are coughing up or vomiting blood.
- You develop more severe throat pain uncontrolled with medications or you start to drool.
- You develop difficulty breathing, talking, or find it easier to breathe while leaning forward.

Document Released: 12/18/2006 Document Re-Released: 09/26/2009
ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.