Peritonsillar Cellulitis

Peritonsillar cellulitis is an infection around a tonsil. This infection usually affects just one of the two tonsils. The result is a severe sore throat. Peritonsillar cellulitis can develop at any age. It often develops in individuals who have had frequent sore throats and who have frequently taken medications to kill germs (*antibiotics*).

CAUSES

Peritonsillar cellulitis is usually caused by more than one type of germ (*bacteria*).

SYMPTOMS

At first, it might seem like a regular sore throat. But a sore throat from peritonsillar cellulitis does not go away in a few days. Instead, it gets worse.

- Early symptoms of peritonsillar cellulitis may include:
  - Fever and/or chills.
  - A throat that is sore on one side only.
  - Pain in one ear.
  - Pain when swallowing.
  - Feeling more tired than usual.
- Later symptoms may include:
  - Severe pain when swallowing.
  - Drooling.
  - Trouble opening the mouth wide.
  - Bad breath.
  - Voice changes.

DIAGNOSIS

In most cases, your caregiver can make the diagnosis by knowing your symptoms, examining your throat and getting a throat culture. Blood samples may also help to determine the cause of your sore throat.

TREATMENT

This is not an ordinary sore throat. It is a condition that needs to be treated quickly. If it is not treated, swelling and pus (*an abcess*) can develop.

- Peritonsillar cellulitis is usually treated with antibiotics. These infections require oral antibiotics for a full 10 days and/or antibiotics given into the vein (*intravenous, IV*).
- Medications may be prescribed for pain or fever.
- Sometimes, medications that fight swelling (steroids) are prescribed.
- If an abscess has formed, the abscess may need to be drained.
- Individuals who have repeated cases of peritonsillar cellulitis may need an operation to remove the tonsils (*tonsillectomy*).

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Take antibiotics as directed by your caregiver. Take all the antibiotics, even if you start to feel better.
- Some pain is normal with this condition. Take pain medication as directed by your caregiver. Do not take any other pain medications unless approved by your caregiver.
- Gargle with warm salt water. Use 1 teaspoon (5 grams) salt mixed in 1 cup (250 mL) of warm water. Gargle for 30 seconds or more before spitting the solution out. Gargle 3 to 4 times a day or as needed. This may help ease pain and swelling.
- A liquid or soft food diet may be necessary if it is hard to swallow.
- It is important to drink fluids. Drink enough water and fluids to keep your urine clear or pale yellow.
- Do not smoke.
- Rest and get plenty of sleep.

- If your caregiver has given you a follow-up appointment, it is very important to keep that appointment. Your caregiver will need to make sure that the infection is getting better. It is important to check that an abscess is not forming.
- Return to work or school as directed by your caregiver.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- The swelling increases.
- Swallowing becomes more difficult.
- You are unable to take your antibiotic.
- You have an oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C).

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have trouble breathing.
- The pain gets worse even after taking pain medication.
- There is pus around or near the tonsils.
- Your voice changes.
- You are drooling.
- You cough up bloody sputum.
- You are unable to swallow.
- You have an oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C), not controlled by medicine.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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