

A prospective cohort study exploring the impact of tonsillectomy on feeding difficulties in children

Maia Walsh¹, Retzler R¹, Huang J¹, Daglish A¹, Daniel Tweedie¹, and Chris Pepper¹

¹Evelina London Children's Hospital

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Abstract

Objectives Paediatric feeding difficulties are common, affecting up to 25% of otherwise healthy children, symptoms include food refusal, gagging, choking, and excessive mealtime duration. These symptoms are commonly described in pre-operative discussions about tonsillectomy. This prospective study explores the impact of tonsillectomy on paediatric feeding difficulties. **Methods** This prospective cohort study invited caregivers of all children undergoing tonsillectomy at our institution to complete a PediEAT questionnaire about their children's feeding behaviours, pre and post-operatively. The study was completed in two phases with 9 questions administered in phase 1 and three additional questions added for phase 2. A free text comments box was also provided. Responses were graded from 0-5, where 0 is 'never a problem' and 5 is 'always a problem' with eating behaviours. **Results** 102 participants were recruited between January 2020 – January 2022. The mean age of participants was 4.1 years, 87% had a concurrent adenoidectomy. The mean time to completion of post-operative questionnaire was 23 weeks after surgery. 9 of the 12 questions showed a statistically significant improvement in post-operative scores using a paired student t-test ($p < 0.05$). The most significant improvements related to "gets tired from eating and is unable to finish" (1.49 pre-op, 0.91 post op, $p < 0.01$) and "eats food that needs to be chewed" (1.4 pre-op, 0.72 post-op, $p < 0.01$). 13% of participants only underwent tonsillectomy and this group also showed a statistically significant improvement in fatigue during eating ($p < 0.05$). **Conclusion** Symptoms of fatigue during eating and avoidance of food requiring mastication are most likely to improve following tonsillectomy in children.

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