

Enlarged adenoids

Enlarged adenoids is the unusual growth of the adenoid pad.

The adenoid pad in babies is normally very small. The adenoid space starts to become larger during the first year of life. The size of the adenoid is quite different between individual children.

Enlarged adenoids can become nearly the size of a golf ball and completely block airflow through the nasal passages. Even if enlarged adenoids are not substantial enough to physically block the back of the nose, they can obstruct airflow enough so that breathing through the nose requires an uncomfortable amount of work, and you may notice mouth breathing instead of breathing through the nose.

The adenoid usually reaches its greatest size by age 5 years or so.

The adenoids enlarge when they are infected. Although the tissue is designed to fight infection, sometimes bacteria and viruses can live there. Chronic infection, either viral or bacterial, can keep the pad of adenoids enlarged for years, even into adulthood.

Adenoids are rarely visible to the naked eye. It usually takes the use of mirrors or fiber optic endoscopes to visualize them.

Symptoms

Large adenoids will block air passage in both the nose and the ears. This obstruction of normal air ventilation can lead to both sinusitis and ear infections. Irresistible urges to cough, snoring, and restless sleep are all symptoms.

Surgical removal of the adenoids is a procedure called adenoidectomy. An adenoidectomy is most often performed because of nasal obstruction, but is also performed to reduce middle ear infections and fluid. This surgery is also performed on patients who have chronic ear infections caused by the adenoids blocking the eustachian tube.