

New Research Offers A Breakthrough On Tonsil Stones

The June edition of *Ear, Nose & Throat Journal* will include an article on a revolutionary new treatment that has been developed to treat tonsil stones, also known as tonsilloliths. Up until now, there has been no good treatment other than a tonsillectomy to get rid of tonsil stones for good. And, in some patients, tonsillectomy can lead to excess bleeding and complications. Christopher Y. Chang, M.D., with Fauquier Ear Nose & Throat Consultants in Warrenton, Virginia and Richard Thrasher, M.D., with The Ear Nose & Throat Centers of Texas in McKinney, Texas, came up with a novel and effective approach to eradicate tonsil stones.

The technique, known as coblation tonsil cryptolysis, is unique in that it can be performed in most adult patients without sedation and using only local anesthesia, much like laser tonsil cryptolysis. As with laser cryptolysis, pain is significant for only a few days and most adults resume a normal diet and activity within one week. This is unlike tonsillectomy, which entails a recovery of several weeks. However, coblation avoids the potential risks associated with laser use, including potential airway fire, retinal damage, oral and facial burns, as well as high equipment costs.

Coblation uses a controlled, FDA-approved, non-heat driven process that relies on the use of radio frequency energy to excite the electrolytes in a conductive saltwater medium. The numbers of adults with tonsil stones is on the rise due to large numbers of people who still have their tonsils. Unfortunately, the condition is often misdiagnosed. What happens is that mucus, dead cells, and other debris collect in the deep pockets of the tonsils and gradually condense into small blobs. Bacteria then feed on the collected matter, causing an unpleasant odor.

Most stones are about the size of a pencil eraser, although doctors have found some to be more than an inch wide. They lead to throat pain and the feeling that an object is stuck in the throat. They can cause a variety of side effects, including ear pain, in addition to a sore throat. The stones are also a significant source of halitosis, causing personal and social problems for patients. Some physicians believe that certain prescription medications may contribute to the problem by causing dry mouth which, in turn, causes anaerobic bacteria to go into overdrive.

Up until Drs. Chang and Thrasher's breakthrough, patients were instructed to gargle with a non-alcohol based mouthwash and use tools such as a Waterpik to dislodge the stones (which they had to do on a regular basis), or they had surgery. "We were delighted to hear about the acceptance of our article in the *Journal* this month," stated Chang. "This means that so many people who suffer from tonsil stones will have a safe mechanism for relief, and primary physicians will be able to more easily identify this sometimes misdiagnosed condition and refer patients for treatment."

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