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Tooth infection and tonsillitis

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SIR—Niessen (Dec 14, p 1602)¹ discusses pericoronitis as one cause of tonsillitis. The organisms in pericoronitis may also perhaps, induce tonsillitis because of the proximity of anatomical structures, and through-flow of masticated bolus. Differentiation of the source of current tonsillar infection may be assisted by reference to the patient's history of lower third molar or tonsillar inflammation.

Between April, 1984, and December, 1995, we saw 656 patients (aged 16–30 years) with 1173 lower third molars affected by pericoronitis. None of these patients had both tonsillitis and pericoronitis as chronic conditions. Only one patient (a 23-year-old man) developed peritonsillar abscess after pericoronitis in a partly-erupted mandibular third molar. 483 of our patients had partly erupted lower third molars, which may have had persistent local infection. Thus, the extension of pericoronitis to the peritonsillar space seems to be infrequent, and bacterial cultures from tonsillar swabs (identifying gram-negative pathogens that cause pericoronitis) should establish or rule out a link between pericoronitis and tonsillitis.

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¹ Niessen LC. Pericoronitis as a cause of tonsillitis. *Lancet* 1996; **348**: 1602–03.

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