Microdebrider Tonsillectomy Bests Electrocautery

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Intracapsular tonsillectomy performed with a microdebrider results in less pain and quicker recovery than does tonsillectomy involving electrocautery, Dr. Craig S. Derkay said at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery Foundation.

A study of 300 patients aged 2-17 years found that, compared with the electrocautery group, the microdebrider group returned to normal activities an average of 1.5 days earlier and stopped taking pain medications 2.5 days earlier.

Intracapsular tonsillectomy performed with a microdebrider "seems to result in a quicker recovery and resumption of normal activities than standard tonsillectomy. Because this method leaves the connective tissue capsule intact, the muscles of the pharynx aren’t exposed to secretions and food, so patients experience less pain and are able to start eating sooner," Dr. Derkay, director of pediatric otolaryngology at Eastern Virginia Medical School in Norfolk, said in an interview.

The prospective, single-blind, randomized controlled trial was funded by a grant from Medtronic Inc., which markets the debrider used in the study. A total of 300 children with obstructive sleep disorders were enrolled. Half received tonsillectomy using low-wattage electrocautery (13 watts); half received microdebrider intracapsular tonsillectomy. Adjuvant therapy was standardized, and the only variation was in the instrument used to remove the tonsils.

Dr. Derkay, who disclaimed any financial interest in Medtronic or the device, described the microdebrider as a powered instrument connected to suction and irrigation, with a small blade rotating 2,000 times per minute.

The researchers used validated quality-