



Post-Operative Tympanostomy Tube Instructions

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Tympanostomy (ears) tubes are used for children who have repeated ear infections. They are also indicated for children or adults who have fluid in the middle ear space that does not clear with medications. This can occur when the eustachian tube does not function properly and a partial vacuum (negative pressure) develops in the space behind the ear drum. The tubes allow necessary ventilation and drainage through the ear drum as long as they remain in place.

During placement, a small incision is made in the ear drum. The tube is placed in this incision to keep the hole open. The tubes will generally stay in place 9-12 months. In general, the ear drum will grow and push the tubes out. Some tubes come out earlier; some can stay in for more than two years. The holes in the ear drum usually heal when the tubes come out. Rarely (1%), the holes do not close on their own and a surgical procedure called a myringoplasty or tympanoplasty (patching the ear drum) may be necessary at some point.

The day of surgery children may be sleepy or fussy until they are fully awake and have some juice or formula. There is usually little to no pain. Tylenol can be used for the first few days in doses appropriate for age. If ear drops are prescribed, use 5 drops in each ear twice daily for 5 days, unless instructed otherwise by your physician. A small amount of blood-tinged drainage or even clots may be noticed for the first few days. Do not be alarmed; this results from making an incision in the ear drum. If this lasts longer than 4 days, then notify the physician.

The child should be under adult supervision the day of surgery because of the possible lingering effects of anesthesia. The child may go to school or day care the following day. No change in diet is necessary.

Drainage from the ears occurs in 20-30% of children who have tubes. The lining of the ear and nose are continuous so that allergies, viral infections, or purulent (pus-forming) infections of the nose may lead to drainage through the tubes and out the ears. If drainage is discolored or accompanied by fever, discuss it with your physician. Otherwise, you may use the drops prescribed for 2-3 days and call our office if the drainage persists.

Please schedule an appointment for 2-3 weeks after surgery. Following the first visit, the ears are to be checked for several months until the tubes are out and the holes in the ear drums have healed.