



Tampa Bay Pediatric E.N.T.

EAR TUBE INSTRUCTIONS

WHAT ARE EAR TUBES?: Your doctor has recommended the insertion of ear tubes. Ear tubes are also commonly known as tympanostomy tubes, ventilation tubes, pressure equalizing tubes, or “PE” tubes. Ear tubes decrease the frequency of ear infections by allowing air in and by draining fluid out of the middle ear. By preventing fluid from remaining in the middle ear, tubes can also help to restore and preserve normal hearing. Tubes do not cause hearing loss. The tubes are inserted under general anesthesia. Your surgeon uses a microscope to gently place the tube through a very small incision in the ear drum. The tube is designed to be held in place without stitches. When fluid is present in the middle ear it is removed at the time of surgery.

POST OPERATIVE CARE: Most children are back to normal a few hours after surgery. Most children do not have any significant post-operative pain. Your child may be tired, irritable and experience minor pain after tube surgery. If your child is fussy or runs a fever after surgery, give your child Tylenol every four hours. Your child may pull or tug at the ears for a few days after surgery. Some children may experience nausea, vomiting, or fatigue from the general anesthetic. This should resolve within a few hours. Begin with a liquid diet, and advance the diet to normal as the child feels like eating. If nausea persists, please call the office.

POST OPERATIVE DRAINAGE: Since an opening into the middle ear has been created, minor drainage is common after tube insertion. When present, it may be clear or blood-tinged. This drainage usually stops promptly after the first day or two following surgery. If an ear drop is prescribed, please use four drops in both ears, three times a day. These drops occasionally are irritating for some children. If this happens and your child is unable to stand the drops, you may stop using the drops.

HEARING: When fluid is removed at the time of surgery, some children notice an immediate improvement in hearing after the placement of ear tubes. A child can sometimes be frightened by normal sounds which now seem louder. This resolves in a short time as they become accustomed to normal sound volumes.

PROTECTION FROM WATER: After ear tubes are inserted, you should try to prevent water from entering the ear canal. Most often it is not a problem if water enters the ear, but water can carry bacteria into the middle ear and cause an infection. We recommend the use of ear plugs during times of possible water exposure such as baths, pool and ocean swimming. Silicone ear putty is available in most pharmacies. Form fitted soft molded plugs are available through the office for a charge of \$15.00. In addition, a neoprene headband can be worn over ear plugs to provide a second layer of protection for active swimmers. These are also available through the office at a cost of \$20.00. If water should accidentally get into the ears, nothing usually happens. If there is pain or drainage, you should begin using the ear drops that were prescribed after surgery.

INFECTION: Ear tubes have been proven to reduce the frequency and severity of ear infections in most cases. However, an infection can still sometimes occur even with the use of tubes. With tubes in place, an ear infection is usually associated with painless drainage from the ear. If your child develops ear pain, difficulty hearing or drainage from the ear that does not promptly stop after starting the ear drops; you should contact your physician. They will sometimes ask you to see us in our office.

HOW DOES THE TUBE COME OUT?: It is natural for ear tubes to fall out of the ear drum on their own. Depending upon the type of tube placed, most ear tubes come out between 6 to 12 months after insertion. Most children outgrow the need for tubes by the age of 5 or 6. In the U.S., research studies show that about 6% to 7% of kids have sufficient ear infections that persist to require a second set of ear tubes.

FOLLOW UP: In most cases a child can return to school or daycare the day after ear tube insertion. Please schedule a follow-up visit to the office about three weeks after insertion. This allows a brief examination to make sure the tubes are working well. In some cases a hearing test will also be done at this time. You can call the office for an appointment.

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