

An Insider's Guide to Caring for Ear Tubes

RM Rosenfeld

Congratulations! Now that your child has ear tubes you can finally *relax*. If you follow the suggestions below, your child should enjoy healthy ears and excellent hearing.

After Surgery

Your child may be cranky or tired from the brief anesthesia, but will return to normal very quickly. Although the tubes do not cause any pain, some children will poke or manipulate their ears because they initially feel different. Please do not worry; your child cannot reach or dislodge the tube. Drainage from the ear canals may occur for several days after surgery, and represents a gradual return of the middle ear to a normal state. Do not be alarmed if the discharge is mixed with a small amount of blood. Ear drops (if prescribed) should be used for 3 days after surgery.

While the Tubes are in Place

Properly functioning tubes will prevent ear infections and ensure optimal hearing. While the tube is in place your child cannot feel it and will likely not even know it is there. There is *no need* for routine water precautions to keep the ears dry when bathing, swimming, or showering. Water will not enter the tiny opening in the tube under most circumstances, but may enter when diving deeply under water (6 feet or more) or dunking the head in a bathtub with soapy water (which has a low surface tension and get in the tube more easily). If your child experiences pain or discomfort during water exposure you can keep water out using cotton with Vaseline, a silicone earplug, or a custom fitted plug.

Tube Check-Ups

Regular check-ups are essential for proper tube function, and are required *even if your child is having no problems*. Please schedule an office visit 4-6 weeks after surgery to check your child's tubes. Additional check-ups are required *every 6 months* while the tubes remain in place (usually about 6 to 18 months). Appointments are generally scheduled at least one month in advance, so please allow adequate lead time when calling. We do not recommend that you primary care doctor be the only professional monitoring the tubes; visits with the specialist every 6 months are extremely important.

If You See Drainage from the Ears

Drainage from the ears may occur during a cold, or if water manages to pass through the tube opening (very difficult!) into the middle ear. *Do not panic if you see drainage, even if it is bloody*; there is no danger to your child's ears or hearing. If you notice any discharge: 1) place cotton in the ear canal to absorb the drainage and change it often, 2) use an ear plug (or cotton with Vaseline) when bathing to keep out water, and 3) do not allow your child to swim until the ear has been dry for at least 48 hours. Drainage persisting despite these measures is treated as a routine ear infection *by your pediatrician or family doctor*, with antibiotic-containing ear drops *alone*. An oral antibiotic may also be necessary if your child is very ill or does not improve after several days of ear drops.

When to Call Us

Please call our office if: 1) your child's regular doctor doesn't see the tube (don't worry—it can't fall into the middle ear), 2) your child has hearing loss or continued ear infections (the tube may be blocked), 3) drainage from the ears persists beyond 7 days, 4) you see the tube lying in the ear canal (it does no harm while there), or 5) there is excessive wax build-up in the ear canal. Ask to speak with the nurse when you call; she will discuss it with the doctor and arrange timely follow-up.

I have received a copy of this information sheet.

Parent or Guardian _____ Relation to child _____

Child's name _____ Date _____