



Ear Infections with Ear Tubes

Patient and Family Education

This teaching sheet contains general information. If you have any additional questions, please speak with the office nurse at (813) 262-1330.

Your child may still get an ear infection with tubes in place. If an infection occurs, you will usually notice drainage or a bad smell from the ear canal.

If your child gets an ear infection *with* visible drainage or discharge from the ear canal:

1. Do not worry: Ear drainage indicates that the tubes are working to drain the infection from the middle ear space. Most children do not have pain or fever when the ear tubes are in place and working.
2. Ear drainage may be clear, cloudy or bloody. You may also notice dry crusting on the ear. There is no danger to hearing.
3. The best treatment is the antibiotic ear drops provided post-operatively (Ciprodex). Place 4 drops in the ear canal twice daily for 5-10 days (stop when drainage stops) to the draining ear. "Pump" the flap of skin in front of the ear canal (tragus) a few times after placing the drops. This will help the drops enter the ear tube.
4. If the drainage is so thick that you are unable to instill the ear drops, please call the office and Dr. Hotchkiss will suction the drainage from the canal.
5. Ear drainage may build up or dry at the opening of the ear canal or on the external ear. Remove the drainage with a cotton-swab dipped in hydrogen peroxide or warm soapy water. Do not put anything in the ear canal.
6. Dry Ear Precautions: Prevent water entry into the ear canal during bathing or hair washing by using an ear plug or a cotton ball saturated with Vaseline to cover the opening. Swimming should be avoided until the drainage resolves.
7. To avoid yeast infections of the ear canal, do not use the antibiotic eardrops frequently or more than 10 days at a time.
8. Oral antibiotics are unnecessary for most ear infections with tubes unless your child is very ill, has another reason to be on an antibiotic, or the infection does not go away using ear drops.

If your child gets an ear infection *without* visible drainage from the ear canal:

1. Ask your primary doctor if the tube is open (functioning); if it is, the infection should resolve without a need for oral antibiotics or antibiotic ear drops.
2. If your doctor gives you an antibiotic or ear drop prescription anyway, ask if you can wait a few days before filling it; chances are high you will not need the medication. Use Tylenol or Motrin to relieve pain, if necessary, during the first few days.
3. If the tube is not open but it is in place, the ear infection is treated as if the tube was not there. Your Pediatrician will likely prescribe an oral antibiotic. The blocked tube does not do any harm (and will not cause a problem), but it also does not do any good. Please call the office to schedule an appointment for after oral antibiotics to discuss options for unblocking the ear tube.

When should I call the doctor?

Call the office if your child experiences:

- Your Pediatrician is unable to see the ear tube
- Your child has hearing loss, continued ear infections or continued ear pain/discomfort
- Excessive drainage through which you are unable to place ear drops
- Ear drainage continues for more than 7 days
- Drainage from the ear occurs frequently (more than twice in 4 months)
- There is excessive wax build-up in the ear canal

Adapted from Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery

- If you have any concerns about how your child looks or feels

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