

Ear Tubes

General Information: A myringotomy is an incision made in the eardrum to remove fluid or infection from the middle ear space behind the eardrum. Usually, a small silicone or plastic ventilating tube (tympanostomy tube) is inserted through this opening to allow air to circulate within the middle ear and/or allow fluid to drain from the middle ear. This tube does not impair the hearing, nor can it be felt by the patient. The tube usually remains in place for 6 to 24 months, and then naturally falls out on its own.

Day of Surgery: The procedure takes only a few minutes to perform under a general anesthetic. Liquid or soft foods may be taken after your child has fully awakened from the anesthetic. Mild pain in the ear may be present and is readily relieved by acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Motrin). Blood-tinged drainage from the ear after surgery is very common and may last for several days. A cotton ball may have been inserted in the ear canal at the time of surgery to absorb drainage. The cotton ball cotton should be changed as often as necessary while the drainage is present.

Eardrops of an antibiotic solution will have been used at the time of tube placement. You will receive a bottle of antibiotic eardrops from the surgeon in the waiting area after surgery. You will use these eardrops at home for a few days after surgery. Place 3 drops in each ear, 3 times a day, for 3 to 5 days after surgery (the duration of therapy will be discussed with you). These eardrops help treat any underlying infection and/or prevent the tube from becoming clogged with blood. The day after surgery, activity should return to normal, and your child may return to daycare or school.

Water Precautions: Your child may bathe, shower, and swim in the pool without ear plugs. Swimming and diving more than 3 feet underwater may result in water entering the middle ear through the tube, possibly leading to discomfort and/or an ear infection. Those children who are swimming more than 3 feet underwater should wear ear plugs coupled with a neoprene head band or swim cap. Ear plugs (called DocMolds) are available through Otolaryngology clinic.

Ear Drainage & Infections: Ear drainage may occur immediately after the procedure and/or at any time while the tubes are in place and open (patent). If the ear drainage is runny, white, yellow-green, bloody, or foul smelling, please fill the antibiotic ear drop prescription that was provided at the time of surgery and use the ear drops as directed. Drainage from ear tubes usually means an infection is present. If the tubes are in place and open, these infections usually respond to the antibiotic ear drops without the need for oral antibiotics.

Contact Information: The Otolaryngology nurse can be reached at (603) 650-4399 and can answer any additional concerns or questions you may have in the post-operative period. The Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center operator can be reached at (603) 650-5000.

In addition, the following web page has helpful information regarding common pediatric ear, nose, and throat concerns: <http://www.entnet.org/kidsent>.

Follow-up: You already have an appointment scheduled approximately one month after surgery to return to Otolaryngology clinic for your first post-operative visit. If you need to confirm the appointment, please contact the office at (603) 650-8123.