Ear Tube Surgery

What are ear tubes?
Ear tubes are known by many names including tympanostomy tubes, ear-ventilating tubes, or most often PE (pressure equalizing) tubes. These tiny hollow tubes are made of soft plastic, often shaped like small sewing bobbins. PE tubes reduce the number of ear infections by letting air into and draining fluid out of the middle ear. Keeping this fluid out of the middle ear can help bring back normal hearing. The small tubes that are used do not cause hearing loss or long-term damage to the eardrum.

What is involved with ear tube surgery?
PE tubes are surgically placed in Day Surgery. Your child will be out of surgery within an hour. Your child will be asleep through the surgery (have general anesthesia). Using a microscope, the ENT (ear, nose and throat) doctor makes a small cut in the eardrum. Any fluid in the middle ear is taken out. The PE tube is put through the hole in your child’s eardrum and will stay in place without any stitches.

How do I care for my child after surgery?
Most children are back to normal a few hours after surgery. If your child is fussy or runs a fever after surgery, give acetaminophen (Tylenol) every 4 hours according to the directions on the bottle for your child’s age. Some children may feel sick to their stomach or throw up after surgery. First give your child cool, clear liquids to drink. If your child feels like eating, slowly add regular foods until back to a normal diet. If your child still feels sick or is throwing up 12 to 24 hours after the surgery, call the ENT clinic.

Is there any drainage from the ear after this type of surgery?
Because an opening in the eardrum has been made, drainage from the middle ear may occur for 2 to 3 days after the PE tubes have been placed. Call the ENT Clinic if drainage continues for more than 3 days. The drainage may be clear, pink or bloody. The doctor may give you some medicine drops for the occurrence. If the doctor wants your child to have this medicine, put 5 drops in each ear, 2 times a day for 3 days.
These drops may sting a little for some children. If this happens and your child is too uncomfortable, you may stop the drops.

**Does this surgery affect my child’s hearing?**

Many children can hear better right away after the tubes have been placed. Your child may be frightened by normal noises that now seem loud. This will go away as your child gets used to hearing normal sound volumes.

**Is it harmful if water gets into my child’s ear?**

There are differing opinions about getting water in the ear after tubes have been placed. Often there won’t be a problem if water does get in the ears, but water may carry germs into the middle ear through the tube and can cause an ear infection. Until your child’s post-operative visit, we ask that you cover a small piece of cotton with Vaseline and place this inside your child’s ear canal to protect the middle ear.

Try to keep soapy bath water out of the ears, but pouring a cup of water over the head to rinse the hair, or showering carefully probably would not get much water in the ears. It is best to avoid getting lake, river or other dirty water in the ears. Your doctor may or may not recommend protecting the ears during swimming in pools. If he or she does, silicone ear putty or specially made ear molds can be placed in the outer ear to block the ear canal. With or without protection, diving should be avoided.

**Will this cure my child’s ear infections?**

PE tubes will help stop ear infections most of the time. However, ear infection can still happen. It usually happens in conjunction with a cold or sinus infection. You need to first notify your primary care physician (PCP). He or she will take care of your child. If the treatment is not successful, you may need to return your child’s ENT doctor.

**When do the PE tubes come out?**

PE tubes do not need to be surgically removed in most cases. PE tubes are slowly pushed out of the eardrum into the outer ear canal (not into the middle ear). This usually happens 9 to 12 months after surgery. You may be able to see the tube before it falls out – do not try to remove it. Most children will not need a second set of PE tubes. By the time the tubes have fallen out, most children have outgrown the need for tubes.

**Follow-up**

Your child will need to be seen 3 weeks after surgery. Call the ENT clinic at 720-777-5630.

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