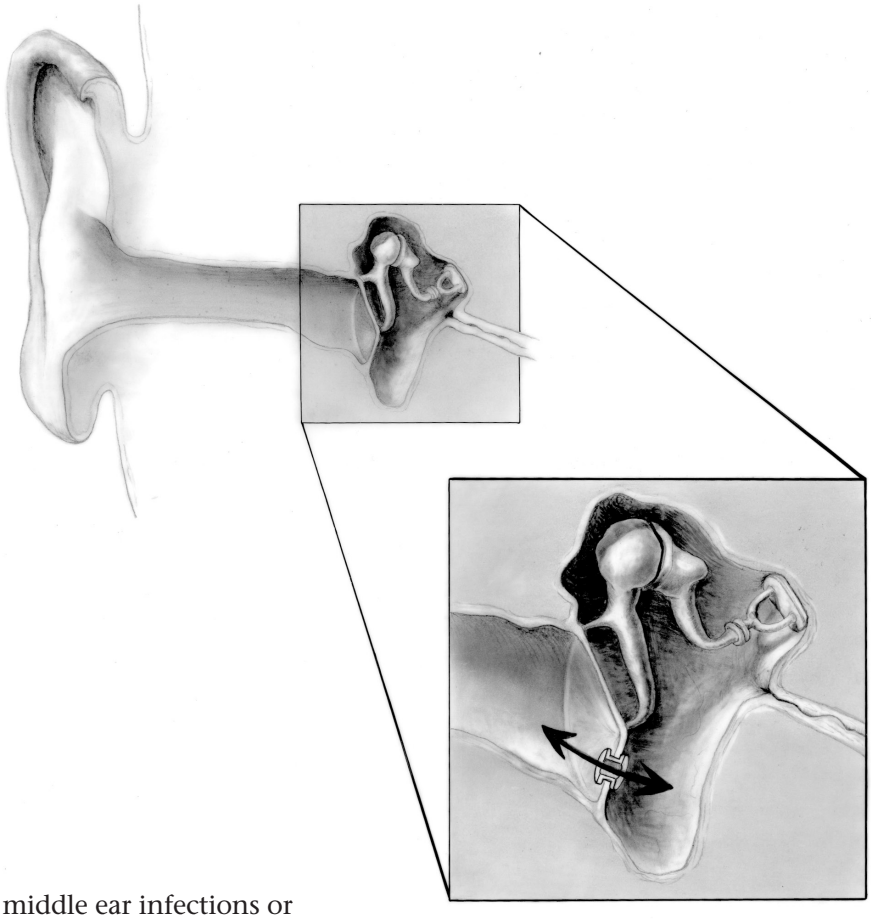
Let's Talk
About...

Tympanostomy tubes



Many children suffer from middle ear infections or fluid in their middle ear and need surgery. During surgery, tympanostomy (tim-pan-AW-stowme) tubes, sometimes called pressure equalization tubes, are placed in your child's eardrum. These tubes help remove fluid or debris from the middle ear space.

The eardrum normally vibrates with sound. If the middle ear is filled with fluid instead of air, hearing is muffled or garbled. This can also cause an earache. Hearing usually improves soon after the tubes are placed.

Diet

When can my child eat?

After your child wakes up from the procedure, he can take clear liquids that are easily digested. Clear liquids include Pedialyte®, water, apple juice, Gatorade®, Popsicle®, and plain Jell-O®. Most babies can take a bottle or resume breast-feeding. Your child may resume a normal diet after leaving the hospital. You should start with soft, easily digested foods. Try to stay away from high fat or greasy foods like hamburgers and pizza for 24 hours following the procedure.

What should I do about nausea and vomiting?

Sedation from the procedure, car movement, and pain medicine can all cause nausea and vomiting. You can control nausea and vomiting by having your

child lie quietly and decrease movement. You should also wait to have your child drink until he feels less sick. At times it is impossible to prevent vomiting. If your child vomits, wait until his stomach has settled down (about 30 minutes after vomiting), then have him take small sips of clear liquids or ice chips (little pieces of ice) every 5 to 10 minutes. If your child is under 2 years old, try giving him water, apple juice, or Pedialyte. If he is older, try a Popsicle, Gatorade®, Jell-O®, decaffeinated Coke®, or 7-UP®. Help your child to drink every 15 to 30 minutes, but do not force it. If the nausea returns, wait another 30 minutes and try again. Once your child has stopped feeling sick, start feeding him solid foods.

How will I know if my child is drinking enough?

After the procedure, your child may have low body fluids. Some signs of not having enough to drink include dark yellow urine, a dry mouth (no spit), chapped lips, and the soft spot on your baby's head sinking inwards. If you notice any of these, give your child more to drink. He should urinate (pee) normally within 24 hours after the procedure. A baby should have six to eight wet diapers in a 24-hour period. An older child should urinate every 6 to 8 hours.

Pain

How can I tell if my child is in pain?

Your child should have very little pain after the tubes are placed in the ears. However, your child may be fussy or irritable. He also may be distracted when sucking on a bottle.

How can I help with my child's pain?

You should keep your child away from loud noises for the first few days after surgery. Your child may be frightened by "normal" sound. This is because the fluid in the ear muffled the sounds. Over time your child will become used to normal sounds, loudness, and pitch.

Medicine

When should I give pain medicine to my child?

If your child appears fussy, give Tylenol® as directed on the bottle. If your child's pain is not relieved with Tylenol, call the Ear, Nose, and Throat (ENT) nurse or ENT doctor.

What medicine does my child need?

If your doctor prescribed antibiotics after surgery, it is important to take them as directed for the entire course of therapy. Antibiotic eardrops help clear drainage from the ears and to keep them open.

How do I give my child eardrops?

Have your child lie down with his head turned to the side. Pull his earlobe down and back. Place the drops in the ear canal and gently "pump" the drops into the ear by gently pushing on the stiff projection of skin in front of the ear canal. Have your child remain lying down for about 1 minute. You can place a cotton ball in the ear canal to prevent the drops from running out of the ear.

Drainage

How much drainage is normal?

Children with ear tubes can still get ear infections. You can tell your child has an infection if there is drainage coming out of his ear. If you see drainage, start using the eardrops and use them for 7 days. If the drainage lasts for more than 7 days, talk to your primary care doctor or ENT doctor.

Bathing and Water Precautions

What about bathing and showering?

It is okay for your child to be exposed to "clean" water. This includes bath and shower water that doesn't have soap in it, or chlorinated water found in a swimming pool. Some children may get ear infections from water entering the ear canal and going through the tube. This happens more often in older children.

Earplugs are recommended only for lake swimming or for competitive swimmers. You can obtain earplugs at the ENT office or purchase them at the pharmacy. .

Activity

How active can my child be?

Sedation may affect your child's coordination for the first few hours after surgery. He should avoid activities such as sports, riding bikes, or swimming for the first 24 hours after surgery. Teenagers and young adults should not drive a car for 24 hours after surgery.

Your child can return to daycare, preschool, or school the day after surgery.

Behavior

What is normal behavior after surgery?

It is normal to see behavior changes after surgery. If behavior changes last longer than 3–4 weeks, call your pediatrician. Possible behavior changes include bed-wetting or acting out, changes in sleep and eating patterns, or nightmares. Be patient with your child. This will help reduce these changes.

When Should I Call the Doctor?

- Temperature over 102 ºF.
- Uncontrolled pain.

How do I call the doctor?

If your child was treated by a pediatric otolaryngologist at Primary Children's Medical Center, the University of Utah, or Riverton, call the ENT office at (801.662.1740) during office hours, 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and speak to the nurse. If the office is closed, call the operator at Primary Children's Medical Center (801.662.1000), and ask for the Pediatric ENT resident on call. You can reach the resident at any time. If your child's doctor is not at Primary Children's Medical Center, follow the instructions given by your doctor's office.

Follow-up appointment

Call your doctor's office as soon as possible and make an appointment for 4 weeks after surgery. Further questions may be answered by accessing our Internet site: www.primarychildrens.com, then click on the Kids Health icon. (A PCMC partnered online health resource for families.)

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Pediatric Education Services, 801.662.3500 | Rev. 2/12, LTA520408154 | *Available in Spanish*