

# CHILDREN WITH A TUBE IN THE EAR

## Ear infection is common

Ear inflammation and infection often occurs when a child has a cold and is one of the most common reasons for bringing the child to the doctor. Even small infants can develop ear infection.

There are two types – acute ear infection (acute otitis media) and glue ear (secretory otitis media). Both types usually clear up spontaneously, but in some cases, especially among the youngest children, treatment is required. The treatment centre can offer advice and determine what needs to be done.

## Why do some children have so much trouble with their ears?

Some children have several acute ear infections in a row, or long periods of glue ear. Researchers do not know for certain why this happens. Some theories suggest that susceptibility to ear infection may be hereditary. There are also studies showing that the ears are not fully developed until four years of age, and that this may be significant.

## Why do we use drainage tubes?

Each year about 10,000 children have a small drainage tube inserted into the eardrum to prevent further acute infections and improve their hearing.

When the ear is healthy, air from the throat enters the middle ear through the auditory tube. During ear infection, the auditory tube swells and therefore stops ventilating the ear. The little plastic tube in the eardrum can then let air into the middle ear instead.

In children with glue ear, the tube has the task of ventilating the middle ear and making it dry up so that the

child can hear normally again. In acute ear infection, the tube acts to relieve pressure in the middle ear and ease the pain by draining the pus formed by new infections.

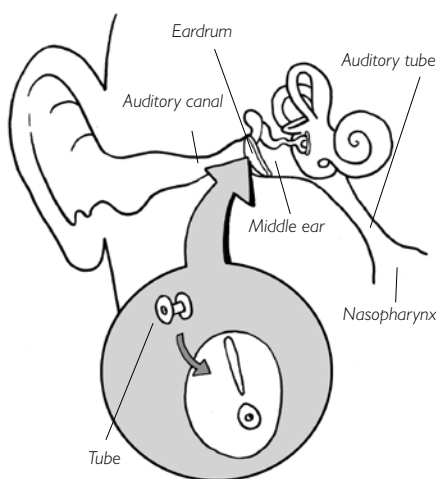
## Do ear tubes help?

A tube in the ear can improve the hearing in children with glue ear which has persisted for more than three months. That's been shown by research. Studies also show that the treatment in these cases makes the child feel better overall.

In recurring acute ear infection – more than three episodes within six months – the researchers do not know whether a tube in the ear has any effect. It may relieve the pain in case of new acute infections, but this has not been studied scientifically.

## Should my child avoid bathing?

Your child can certainly go bathing with a tube in the ear since the risk of ear infection is not increased by normal swimming or playing in the water. Ear protection such as a bathing cap or ear plugs is not required. Ear drops after bathing also have no clear effect, according to the research. This applies to normal bathing and swimming. Diving has not been investigated.



## Why can the ear start to run during tube treatment?

The ear often runs periodically when a child has had a tube surgically inserted. This discharge from the tube is caused by new infection in the ear. In eight cases of ten, discharge from the ear is the only symptom. Two new infections in ten result in fever, pain and hearing impairment. Contact the treating physician for information and advice in the event of new infections.