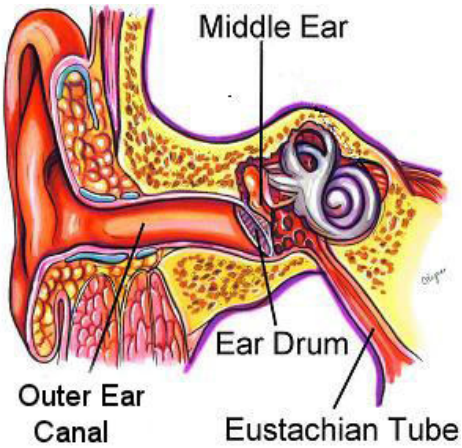
PE (Pressure Equalization) Tubes

Pressure equalizing tubes (PE tubes) are small tubes that are placed through a tiny surgical cut in the eardrum. PE tubes are also called tympanostomy tubes or ventilation tubes.



These tubes are usually placed because of:
- Frequent middle ear infections.
- Chronic fluid in the middle ear.
- Hearing or speech problems due to repeated middle ear infections or fluid build up.

PE tubes help prevent:
- Infections
- Fluid build up.

It is believed tubes do this because they keep the middle ear space full of air (ventilated).

There are two kinds of PE tubes:
- Short term – these tubes usually last only 6 to 9 months. They fall out on their own.
- Long term – these stay in place longer than short term tubes. Often they have to be removed by the surgeon.

Most PE tubes fall out after a while into the outer ear canal. The eardrum seals itself shut. The tube is easily removed from the ear canal by a caregiver or it falls out on its own.

Children are usually given a mild, general anesthetic before surgery. This is something that puts them to sleep. Older children or adults may only need a local anesthetic. This means medicines are used to make the eardrum numb.

BEFORE THE PROCEDURE:

Follow the instructions given by your surgeon as to how to prepare for this surgery.

LET YOUR CAREGIVER KNOW ABOUT:

- Previous reactions to anesthesia.
- Reactions to anesthesia by anyone in your family.

RISKS & COMPLICATIONS OF THE PROCEDURE

There are few risks to this simple surgery. The anesthesia specialist will discuss the risks of anesthesia. Sometimes the eardrum does not heal after the tube falls out. If a hole in the eardrum persists, the hole can be repaired by minor surgery.

AFTER THE PROCEDURE:

- Follow your surgeon's instructions for care after surgery. Often eardrops are prescribed.
- There may be fluid draining from the ear for a few days after the surgery. Fluid may also drain in the future with colds.
- If hearing was decreased due to fluid build up, there should be an improvement right after the surgery.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

Because the PE tube opens a tiny hole between the outer and the middle ear, water can accidentally travel into the middle ear from the outside. Your surgeon may suggest earplugs. It is best to avoid:
- Dunking the head in bath water.

- Diving.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Ear drainage that looks thick, smells bad or is bloody.
- Decreased hearing.
- Balance problems.
- Ear pain.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Redness, tenderness or swelling of the ear canal or ear itself.

Document Released: 06/09/2003 Document Re-Released: 03/14/2011
ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.