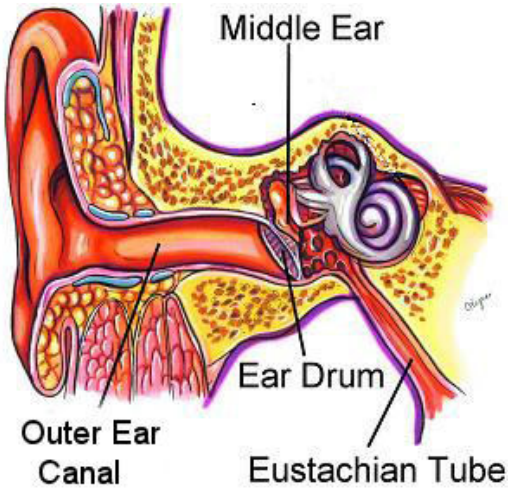
Serous Otitis Media, Fluid in the Middle Ear
(Otitis Media with Effusion)

Serous otitis media is also known as otitis media with effusion (OME). It means there is fluid in the middle ear space. This space contains the bones for hearing and air. Air in the middle ear space helps to transmit sound. The air gets there through the eustachian tube. This tube goes from the back of the throat to the middle ear space. It keeps the pressure in the middle ear the same as the outside world. It also helps to drain fluid from the middle ear space.



CAUSES

OME occurs when the eustachian tube gets blocked. Blockage can come from:

- Ear infections.
- Colds and other upper respiratory infections.
- Allergies.
- Irritants such as cigarette smoke.
- Sudden changes in air pressure (such as descending in an airplane).
- Enlarged adenoids.

During colds and upper respiratory infections, the middle ear space can become temporarily filled with fluid. This can happen after an ear infection also. Once the infection clears, the fluid will generally drain out of the ear through the eustachian tube. If it does not, then OME occurs.

SYMPTOMS

- Hearing loss.
- A feeling of fullness in the ear – but no pain.
- Young children may not show any symptoms.

DIAGNOSIS

- Diagnosis of OME is made by an ear exam.
- Tests may be done to check on the movement of the eardrum.
- Hearing exams may be done.

TREATMENT

- The fluid most often goes away without treatment.
- If allergy is the cause, allergy treatment may be helpful.
- Fluid that persists for several months may require minor surgery. A small tube is placed in the ear drum to:
  - Drain the fluid.
  - Restore the air in the middle ear space.
- In certain situations, antibiotics are used to avoid surgery.
- Surgery may be done to remove enlarged adenoids (if this is the cause).

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Keep children away from tobacco smoke.
- Be sure to keep follow up appointments, if any.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Hearing is not better in 3 months.

- Hearing is worse.
- Ear pain.
- Drainage from the ear.
- Dizziness.

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