



SOUTHERN UTAH
Ear, Nose and Throat

POSTOPERATIVE INSTRUCTIONS FOR TYMPANOSTOMY CARE

General information:

1. The purpose of tympanostomy tubes (ear tubes), which have been placed in the eardrums, is to allow the passage of air into the middle ear spaces. Their purpose is not fluid drainage—although this may occur. The tubes will naturally fall out of the eardrums and into the ear canals in most patients. The length of time the tubes will stay in place is variable, with the average being about 6 - 12 months. After the tubes fall out of the eardrum, the remaining hole in the eardrum closes over 95 percent of the time. If it doesn't close, further surgery may be required in children – usually at age 6 to 8.
2. While the tubes are in place it is oftentimes recommended to keep the eardrums dry, thus preventing bacteria from being washed into the middle ear spaces. When the patient showers, takes a bath or washes his/her hair, the ears should be protected from water by occluding the ear canal with a small piece of cotton covered with Vaseline. A wax-like, silly putty-like material, which can be obtained from most pharmacies, will also work well. Custom fitted earmolds are also available through an audiology office. These will allow certain types of swimming, though diving is still discouraged.

What to expect:

1. If the patient had fluid in the middle ear spaces at the time of surgery, there may be a slight drainage from the ears for several days. This drainage should not persist for more than two or three days. If the patient had hearing loss preoperatively, after the surgery loud noises may be bothersome since the patient's hearing is improved. This discomfort will be temporary as the patient will naturally adjust to normal sound.

Pain:

1. There should be minimal pain associated with placement of ear tubes. Tylenol may be given if needed.

Complications:

1. If the patient develops a postoperative ear infection, there will be a yellow or honey-colored material that runs out of the ear and down the cheek. This will likely occur three or four days after the operation. Call the office for further instructions. Pain will be minimal because pressure behind the eardrum is negligible due to the free drainage of infection through the hole in the tube.

Follow-up:

A follow-up visit is generally scheduled two to three weeks after surgery along with a hearing test. Please call the office for an appointment. It is a good idea to have the patient seen by a doctor every three to four months after surgery to check the tubes. You will want to know when the tubes have fallen out. You will also want to know if the eardrum perforation has closed so that dry ear care can be discontinued.