Grommet Insertion (child)

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This fact sheet is for general information about this procedure only. It is not intended to be used as medical advice or to replace advice that your relevant healthcare professional would give you. If you have a particular medical problem, please consult a healthcare professional.

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What is a grommet?

A grommet is a small plastic or metal tube that is inserted into your child's ear. It is usually recommended to treat glue ear, a common condition where fluid collects in the middle ear behind the eardrum.

What are the benefits?

The grommet allows air to enter the middle ear. This stops fluid building up and the resulting deafness. It will also reduce the number of ear infections that your child has if they are prone to them.

Your doctor may recommend your child has another procedure called an adenoidectomy alongside grommet insertion. This will help remove the glue ear and stop it coming back.

Are there any alternatives?

Many children with glue ear do not need surgery. The condition almost always gets better but it is not always possible to say when this will happen.

Another treatment is to wear a hearing aid until hearing improves.

What will happen if I decide that my child will not have the procedure?

Glue ear almost always gets better. Some children can perform perfectly well, socially and educationally, without any treatment.

However, if glue ear continues for a long time, it can cause the eardrum to become weak and can erode (wear away) the hearing bones in the middle ear. This can cause repeated ear infections and long-term damage to your child's hearing.

What does the procedure involve?

The procedure is performed under a general anaesthetic and usually takes about 20 minutes.

Your surgeon will make a small hole in the eardrum and remove the fluid by suction. They will place a plastic or metal grommet in the hole.

What can I do to prepare my child for the procedure?

Your child should try to maintain a healthy weight. They will have a higher risk of developing complications if they are overweight.

What complications can happen?

The healthcare team are trained to reduce the risk of complications.

Any risk rates given are taken from studies of people who have had this procedure. Your doctor may be able to tell you if the risk of a complication is higher or lower for your child.

Possible complications of this procedure are shown below. Some may be serious.

General complications of any procedure

- Bleeding during or after the procedure
- Allergic reaction to the equipment, materials or medication.

Specific complications of this procedure

- Clear fluid or fluid mixed with blood leaking from the ear for 1 to 2 days.
- Ear discharge lasting longer than 1 to 2 days. Sometimes the grommet will need to be removed.
- Small hole left in the eardrum once the grommet is out.
- Repeated build-up of fluid in the middle ear.
- The problem coming back. Your child may need another procedure to fix it.

Consequences of this procedure

- Pain.

What happens after the procedure?

They should be able to go home the same day.

Your child should not swim for 6 weeks and then should not dive deeper than 2 metres. Other than swimming, your child should be able to return to normal activities after 1 to 2 days.

The grommet will fall out of your child's ear by itself, after 6 to 18 months, depending on the material and design of the grommet.

Summary

Glue ear is a common condition that usually gets better without any surgery. Surgery is recommended when the condition lasts longer than 3 months and the hearing loss is causing problems with speech or schooling.

Keep this information document. Use it to help you if you need to talk to the healthcare team.

Some information, such as risk and complication statistics, is taken from global studies and/or databases. Please ask your surgeon or doctor for more information about the risks that are specific to you, and they may be able to tell you about any other suitable treatments options.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant healthcare team would give you.

Reviewer

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