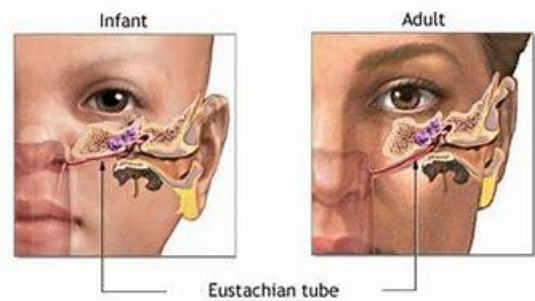




## Recurrent Otitis Media (Ear infections) in Children

### What causes ear infections?

- Most ear infections are caused from getting a cold or respiratory virus. The mucus in your nose travels up your Eustachian tube (the tube that connects the back of your nose to you middle ear) and sits in the middle ear where your hearing bones are. Bacteria then grows in that fluid and causes an ear infection (pain, red, irritated ear drum, pus behind the ear drum). The Eustachian tube does not drain as well in childhood as it will later in life. This is largely secondary to 2 big factors:
  - The Eustachian tube is shorter, weaker, and less effective in infants and young children compared to older children and adults.
  - Respiratory viruses create inflammation which cause swelling in the Eustachian tube.
- Nearly 85% of children will have at least one ear infection by 15 months of age.



#ADAM

### What factors contribute to my child getting ear infections?

- Most children begin having ear infections when they are around other children in a group setting. This may be at age 3 months when they enter daycare, or at age 5 when they enter kindergarten. Children under two years of age are especially at risk.
- Time of year plays a factor. Cold and flu season is the period of greatest risk, regardless of a child's age. The worst time of year for ear infections is November to March.
- Children of parents with history of ear infections or who needed ear tubes are more likely, but not guaranteed, to have frequent ear infections.
- Exposure to tobacco smoke, either from air or clothes, increases a child's risk for getting ear infections.

## What age do children outgrow this problem?

- It is impossible to predict when a given child will outgrow their ear problems.
- Most children outgrow ear infections around 2 years of age, or 1.5-2 years after entering daycare or school. This is about how long it takes for a child to build up immunity to those common colds and respiratory viruses that cause ear infections. There are, however, children who have ongoing ear problems in to their teen years and even as adults.
- Summer is typically the time of year that we see

## How are ear infections treated?

- In many, but not all cases, the body can clear an ear infection even without antibiotics
  - This may take time and may result in lots of discomfort, illness.
  - Some kids, not many, will have complications from ear infections if left untreated.
  - Antibiotics prevent most complications of ear infections and hasten recovery.
  - While antibiotics are helpful for treating infections, they do not prevent them.

## What can I do to prevent ear infections?

- Do your best to avoid sick contacts, wash your hands a lot.
- Don't smoke
- Chiropractics, dairy or gluten free diets have been suggested as strategies. I don't discourage these practices, but don't encourage them either.
- Treatment of allergies has not proven better than placebo for preventing ear infections.
- The definitive cure comes ultimately with passage of time.
- Ear tubes prevent most ear infections

## Ear Tubes

Tubes provide an alternative way to ventilate the space behind the eardrum when the natural drainage is impaired.

- Most ear infections are prevented by ear ear tubes.
- If an infection is not prevented by an ear tube, the infection will drain out of the tube.
- Antibiotic drops can usually be used to treat an ear infection for they can cross the tube into the middle ear directly. Antibiotic drops can be kept at your house, and your purse, and can be started without having to find a doctor.





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- Even if the child still has infections, there is usually less discomfort and few of the infections will require oral antibiotics

### What are the risks of ear tubes?

1. General anesthesia - very low risk, especially at pediatric center
2. Frequent drainage from ear tubes
3. Need for more than one set of tube - roughly 1 in 6
4. Tubes that stay in too long and have to be removed under anesthesia - single digit percentile
5. Hole in eardrum which if it doesn't close over time may require surgery. While a hole in the drum is identified more often, only about 1 in 150 kids who get a tube will need a second operation to close the hole. The hole can be associated with hearing loss (usually mild) and can make them more sensitive to water exposure.
6. Failure of ear tubes to prevent all problems of eustachian tube dysfunction.

### How long does surgery take?

- Just a few minutes

### How long is recovery?

- Generally a day, most miss just one day of work/daycare/school.
- Pain is minimal afterward although an adult friend of mine who had tubes recently said she felt better taking a few tylenol over the day.

### What activities are limited by having ear tubes?

- You can swim without plugs under most circumstances. Older children swimming more deeply underwater may need plugs. Lake water is more likely to cause drainage than other sources.

### How do I schedule and how soon?

- Speak to my scheduler 404-591-1426. Usually 1-3 weeks.

### Will something permanently bad happen to my child if we don't get ear tubes?

- The risk is low but needs to be assessed for each child.
- Usually watching and waiting is acceptable for a few months if warranted, but not required.