



## Grommets: Post-Operative Care

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### Background

- Grommets, also known as ventilation tubes, drain fluid from behind the eardrum to relieve hearing loss and/or pain
- Most grommets stay in for 6 to 18 months, allowing many children to outgrow their ear problems
- Grommets usually fall out on their own. They are very small and you usually do not notice them when they fall out.

### What to expect after surgery

- Your child may resume normal activities, including school/daycare, the day after surgery
- There may be some blood-tinged drainage from the ear after surgery. Drainage is normal for the first 48 hours after surgery.
- Your child may have a mild ear ache for a few hours after surgery

### Medications after surgery

- Some children require a course of ear drops for a few days after grommets are placed. If drops are needed for your child, you will be given a prescription before you leave the hospital.
- Once grommets are inserted they cause minimal pain. Paracetamol or ibuprofen are usually the only pain relief required.

### Water precautions

Most children with grommets do not need to take special precautions when bathing or swimming. Wearing ear plugs has little effect on preventing problems and data show a child would have to wear them on average for almost three years to prevent one episode of mucky discharge from the ears.

Most guidelines recommend against the routine use of water precautions as there is little benefit and this is outweighed by the associated cost, inconvenience and anxiety.

Some children with grommets find that water stings their ears when they swim. If this occurs it will not damage your child's ears, but it may be more comfortable for them to wear ear plugs when swimming.

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## Ear infections

Your child may still get ear infections with grommets, however they are unlikely to have ear pain with these infections.

### Visible drainage from the ear canal

If an infection occurs you usually notice drainage or a bad smell from the ear canal. The drainage may be clear, cloudy, or even bloody. If your child gets an ear infection with visible drainage from the ear canal:

- Do not worry - the drainage indicates the grommet is working
- The best treatment is usually antibiotic drops alone. You may be prescribed 'eye drops' to use in the ear, as these are less likely to sting.
- Oral antibiotics are unnecessary for most ear infections with grommets, unless your child is very ill or has another reason to be on an antibiotic
- When there is drainage from the ear, avoid getting water in the ear canal when bathing or hair washing - cotton wool coated in vaseline works well

### No drainage from the ear canal

If your child gets an ear infection without visible drainage:

- Your doctor or nurse will check if the grommet is still working by looking to see if it is in place and not blocked. If the grommet is working, the infection will usually resolve without the need for antibiotics.
- If the grommet is blocked, the ear infection is treated as if the grommet was not there. The blocked grommet does not do any harm, but neither does it do any good.
- Ibuprofen and/or paracetamol may be necessary for any ear pain

## References

Water precautions for prevention of infection in children with ventilation tubes (grommets).  
Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2016 [DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD010375.pub2.]