

Patient Information:

Eustachian Tube Health

What are eustachian tubes?

The eustachian tube is the canal that connects the middle ear to the nasopharynx (the upper most part of the throat) behind the nose.

Why is it important that my eustachian tubes function normally?

Eustachian tube patency (how much the tube is open) is very important to ear health. In a healthy state, this tube controls the pressure behind the eardrum and middle ear space. Many things can cause a change or increase in pressure in the ear. This in turn can cause the eustachian tube to become partially or completely blocked which causes dysfunction, discomfort and if not corrected potential damage in the ear.

EVENTS THAT MAY CAUSE SLIGHT, TEMPORARY DYSFUNCTION:

- ◆ Pressure changes (i.e. while at high altitudes or during abrupt changes in altitude)
- ◆ Swimming, scuba diving
- ◆ Allergies
- ◆ Infection
- ◆ Loud noise
- ◆ Foreign object in the ear (or impacted ear wax)
- ◆ Congestion from allergies, colds or an upper respiratory infection
- ◆ Tobacco smoke or other airway irritants
- ◆ Anatomical abnormalities

RISK REDUCTION:

Try the following self care measures to see which is most effective for you:

- ◆ Yawn (this may be especially helpful when descending from high altitudes)
- ◆ Chew gum while changing altitudes
- ◆ Try this procedure
 1. Inhale
 2. Quickly but gently pinch your nostrils closed and close your mouth
 3. **Gently*** exhale while holding the nostrils

and mouth closed (*A perforation of the eardrum or an infection may result from exhaling too hard.)

- ◆ Suck on candy while changing altitudes
- ◆ When flying, do not sleep during the descent
- ◆ When diving, descend and ascend slowly
- ◆ Avoid activities which cause pressure changes within the ear while suffering from allergies or respiratory infection
- ◆ Never attempt to place anything inside your ear that is smaller than the tip of your little finger.
- ◆ Talk to your doctor about options for pre-medicating with nasal decongestants or antihistamines before altitude changes
- ◆ Avoid the use of alcohol, caffeine and tobacco

If self-care attempts do not relieve discomfort within a few hours or if your symptoms are chronic, contact your healthcare provider

SYMPTOMS MAY INCLUDE BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO:

- ◆ Dizziness
- ◆ Sensation of ear fullness or stuffiness
- ◆ Slight, temporary hearing loss (can become moderate to severe if dysfunction is prolonged)
- ◆ Discomfort or pain
- ◆ Nosebleed

Contact your healthcare provider if you experience severe ear pain, headache, fever, drainage from your ear or have suffered injury. Signs of ear drainage may be seen as crusted material on a pillow cover used for extended sleeping. It may be white, slightly bloody or yellow in color. Your healthcare provider may take a sample of ear drainage to help determine treatment options.

DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT:

Your healthcare provider may recommend medications such as antihistamines, decongestants or steroids.