

Eustachian Tube Dysfunction

WHAT ARE EUSTACHIAN TUBES?

The eustachian tube is the canal that connects the middle ear to the nasopharynx (the uppermost 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, as the tube controls the pressure behind the eardrum and middle ear space. When there is a change or increase in pressure, the eustachian tube can become partially or completely blocked, resulting in discomfort, decreased hearing or damage to the ear if chronic. Other symptoms may include dizziness, sensation of ear fullness or stuffiness, and feeling as if water is in your ear.

CAUSES:

- ◆ Pressure changes (air travel, changing altitudes when driving, scuba diving and snorkeling, parachuting, diving into water when swimming, mountain climbing, travel to high altitude locations)
- ◆ Allergies
- ◆ Infection
- ◆ Loud noise
- ◆ Foreign object in the ear or impacted ear wax
- ◆ Congestion from allergies, colds, sinus infections
- ◆ Tobacco smoke or other airway irritants
- ◆ Anatomical abnormalities

RISK REDUCTION:

- ◆ Yawn while changing 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 may result from exhaling too hard, especially with an ear infection).

- ◆ 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 health care provider about options for pre-medicating before altitude changes with steroid nasal sprays or nasal decongestants.
- ◆ Avoid the use of tobacco.

CONTACT YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER IF:

- ◆ Self-care attempts do not relieve discomfort or if your symptoms are chronic
- ◆ Severe ear pain
- ◆ Hearing loss
- ◆ Tinnitus (ringing in the ear)
- ◆ Headache
- ◆ Fever
- ◆ Drainage from your ear
- ◆ Injury, such as being slapped across the ear or punched in ear, jumping or diving into water and landing with impact to ear