



Blocked Eustachian tube

What are the Eustachian tubes?

The Eustachian tubes run from the middle ear (the space behind the eardrum) to the back of the nose and throat. The Eustachian tubes are normally closed but open up when swallowing, yawning or chewing. This lets air get into the middle ear space and keeps the air pressure on either side of the eardrum equal. The eardrum is then able to vibrate so that we can hear properly.

Why do the Eustachian tubes get blocked?

In young children the Eustachian tubes are very narrow and can easily become blocked or inflamed. Infections and illnesses occurring at the back of the nose and throat e.g. colds, coughs, sore throats, allergies affecting the nose, can cause the Eustachian tubes to become blocked so that air cannot get into the middle ear.

What are the symptoms of blocked Eustachian tubes?

Common symptoms include:

- A blocked feeling in the ears
- Ringing in the ears
- Muffled hearing
- Popping sounds in the ear
- Pain and tenderness around the ear
- Trouble with balance

Symptoms may last from just a few hours to several weeks. Some children go on to develop Glue Ear (a build-up of fluid in the middle ear) if Eustachian tubes remain blocked for some time.

Treatment for blocked Eustachian tubes.

In most cases blocked Eustachian tubes clear by themselves in a few weeks and no treatment is required. As it improves it is common to hear popping or clicking noises in the ear. Hearing can also go back to normal quite suddenly but then become dull again before completely getting back to normal.

You can gently try and push air into the Eustachian tube by taking a breath in, and then breathing out gently with your mouth closed whilst pinching your nose. This can be helpful if you experience ear pain whilst taking off or coming into land when on a plane.

The Otovent Nasal Balloon can also be used to in an attempt to clear the Eustachian tubes. This involves inflating a small balloon by blowing down the nose. See www.otovent.co.uk for more information.

Your GP may advise taking antihistamine tablet/sprays or using a nasal spray to treat allergies affecting the nose to try and reduce any inflammation in the Eustachian tubes.