

Grommets

What are grommets?

Grommets are very small plastic tubes which sit in a hole in the eardrum. They let air get in and out of the ear. This keeps the ear healthy.

Why do we use grommets?

Some people get fluid behind the ear drum. This is sometimes called 'glue ear'. It is very common in young children, but it can happen in adults too. We don't know exactly what causes glue ear.

Most young children will have glue ear at some time, but it doesn't always cause problems. We only need to treat it if it is causing problems with hearing or speech, or if it is causing lots of ear infections.

How long do grommets stay in for?

Grommets fall out by themselves as the eardrum grows. They may stay in for six months, or a year, or sometimes even longer. You may not notice when they drop out.

Does my child have to have grommets?

Glue ear tends to get better by itself, but this can take a while. We like to leave children alone for the first three months because about half of them will get better in this time. After three months, we see you again and decide whether we need to operate.

If the glue ear is not causing any problems, we can just wait for it to settle by itself. If it is causing problems with poor hearing, poor speech or lots of infections, it may be better to put grommets in.

Can anything else help?

Some doctors may use nose drops or antibiotics to see if they help. Taking out the adenoids may help the glue ear get better, and your surgeon may want to do this at the same time as putting grommets in. A hearing-aid can be used to treat the poor hearing and speech problems that are caused by glue ear. This would mean that your child would not need an operation.

Can I do anything to help my child?

Speak clearly, and wait for your child to answer. Make sure he or she can see your face when you speak. Call your child's name to get them to look at you before you speak. Let nursery and school teachers know that your child has a hearing problem. It may help for your child to sit at the front of the class.

Do Grommets make your ears sore?

Grommets are not usually sore at all. You can give your child painkillers if you need to. Grommets should improve your child's hearing straight away. Some children think everything sounds too loud until they get used to having normal hearing again.

What about ear infections?

Most people with grommets do not get any ear infections. If you see yellow fluid coming out of the ear, it may be an infection. It will not be as sore as a normal infection and your child won't be as ill. If you get some ear drops from your doctor, the problem will quickly settle. Some doctors may prefer to give you antibiotics instead of drops.

Can my child swim with grommets in the ears?

Your child can start swimming a couple of weeks after the operation, as long as they don't dive under the water. You don't need to use earplugs. The hole in the grommet is too small to let water through unless the water has shampoo or soap in it. You therefore need to be careful in the bath or the shower. Plug your child's ears with a cotton-wool ball covered in vaseline.

How long will my child be off nursery or school?

Your child should be able to get back to normal the day after the operation.

Are there any other problems with grommets?

It is OK to fly in an aeroplane with grommets.

We need to check your child' hearing after grommets have been put in to make sure their hearing is better.

Sometimes when a grommets comes out, a small hole is left behind. This usually heals up with time and we rarely need to operate to close the hole.