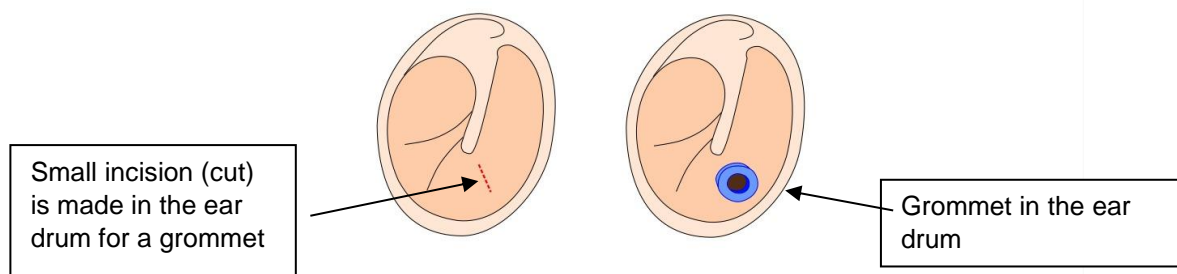


Grommets in Children

This information sheet is designed to help you make an informed decision about your child having grommets. If you have any further questions, please discuss these with our staff before your operation.

WHAT ARE GROMMETS?

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



Picture of a Right ear drum with a grommet in.

WHY DO WE USE GROMMETS?

Some people get fluid behind the ear drum. This is often 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 stage, but it doesn't always cause problems. We only need to treat it if it is causing persistent problems with hearing and/or speech.

Grommets can sometimes be used when children have lots of middle ear infections.



HOW ARE GROMMETS PUT IN?

Grommets are placed in the eardrum under a short general anaesthetic and the procedure is usually performed as a day case admission to hospital. The operation is carried out down the ear canal using a microscope so there are no cuts to see on the outside of the ear. A small opening is made in the ear drum and a grommet is then placed in this opening. The procedure takes between ten and twenty minutes but your child will be in the operating department for around one hour.

HOW LONG DO GROMMETS STAY IN FOR?

Grommets fall out by themselves as the eardrum grows. Grommets typically stay in for around a year but can fall out early or stay in for 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 will monitor your child for the first three months because about half of them will get better in this time. After three months, we will see your child and repeat the hearing test.

If the glue ear is not causing any problems, we can just wait for it to settle by itself.

Using a steroid nasal spray may help some children if they have nasal allergies. Congestion in the nose may affect the normal function of the nose and ears. Antibiotics, antihistamines and decongestants do not help this type of ear problem.

Using a nasal balloon (such as Otovent®) to open the tube to the ear may help older children if used regularly.

CAN ANYTHING ELSE HELP?

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.

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.

ARE GROMMETS PAINFUL?

Grommets are not usually sore. 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.



ARE THERE ANY PROBLEMS WITH GROMMETS?

There is a small risk of developing an infection. These tend not to be as painful as normal ear infections but you may notice fluid coming from the ear. If this occurs we advise you see your GP. A short course of ear drops often settles the infection.

When grommets come out, a small hole is left behind. This usually heals up with time. Rarely, it leaves a persistent hole in the eardrum that may need an operation to repair the ear drum.

Sometimes when the grommets fall out, the glue ear may come back. This can happen to one child out of every three who has grommets put in. We may need to put more grommets in to last until your child grows out of the problem.

CAN MY CHILD SWIM WITH GROMMETS IN THE EARS?

Your child can start swimming a couple of weeks after the operation. Diving under the water is not a good idea as water may pass through the grommet into the ear. To reduce the amount of water getting into the ears your child could use earplugs or a swim band. The hole in the grommet is too small to let water through, unless the water is dirty or has shampoo or soap in it. So you need to be careful in the bath or the shower. Cotton-wool ball covered in Vaseline® can be used in the ear to reduce the risk of water getting into the ear.

HOW LONG WILL MY CHILD BE OFF NURSERY OR SCHOOL?

Your child should be able to return to normal activities the day after the operation.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT GROMMETS?

It is OK to fly in an aeroplane with grommets. The pain from the change in pressure in the aeroplane cannot happen when the grommets are working.

We will need to check your child's hearing after grommets have been put in to make sure their hearing is better. This often performed in the community, usually about 6 weeks after the surgery.

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Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) if you require this leaflet in a different format, or would like to feedback your experience of the hospital. Email ruh-tr.pals@nhs.net or telephone 01225 825656.