

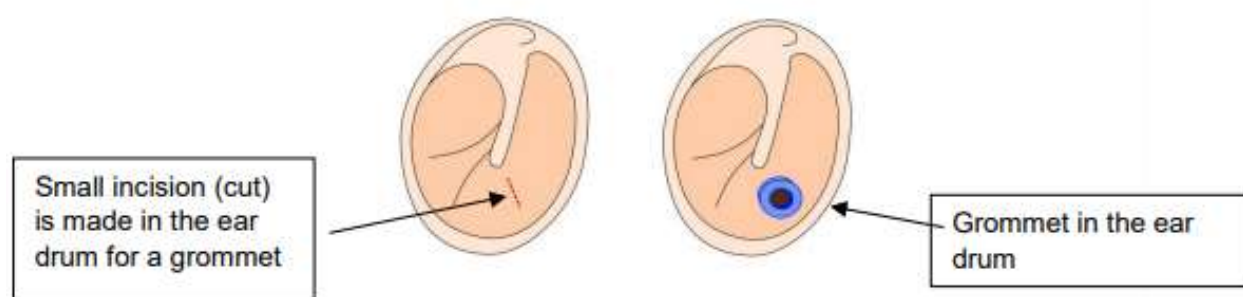
GROMMETS in Adults

Ear, Nose & Throat Department

This information sheet is designed to help you make an informed decision about 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 let air get in and out of the ear. This keeps the ear healthy.



Picture of a Right ear drum with a grommet in.

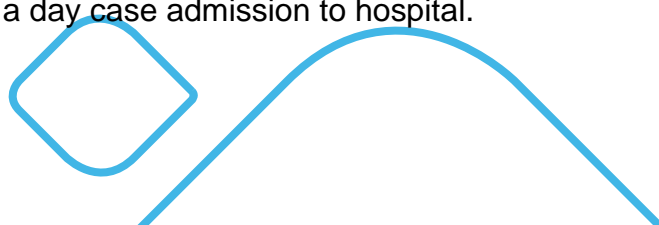
Why do we use grommets?

Some people get fluid behind the ear drum. This is 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 but is related to the eustachian tube dysfunction. If the eustachian tube dysfunction is causing a glue ear with hearing loss, grommets may be a useful treatment.

How are grommets put in?

Grommets are placed in the eardrum either under local anaesthetic or under a short general anaesthetic. 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 you 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. There are different types of grommets. Short-term grommets may stay in for six months, or a year, or sometimes even longer. There are also long term grommets, also known as T-tubes that can last several years. Often a short term grommet is used but if you have had multiple grommets in the past a T-tube may be more appropriate.

Do I have to have grommets?

Glue ear tends to get better by itself, but this can take a while and we will monitor you over several months with repeated hearing tests.

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 people with nasal congestions who 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.

Balloon dilatation of the eustachian tube is available in some hospitals and is helpful in some cases of eustachian tube dysfunction but will depend on your symptoms.

Can anything else help?

If the main symptom of your eustachian tube dysfunction and glue ear is hearing loss, a hearing aid can be a good alternative.

If you have underlying wear and tear loss of your hearing then aids may be a better option as grommets will only treat the hearing loss caused by the glue ear.

Are grommets painful?

Grommets are not usually sore.

Are there any other problems with grommets?

There is a small risk of developing an infection. These tend not to be as painful but cause a discharging ear. If this occurs we advise you see your GP for a short course of ear drops which often settles the infection.

When grommets come out, a small hole is left behind. This usually heals up with time. We rarely need to operate to close the hole.

Sometimes when the grommets fall out, the glue ear may come back. We may need to put more grommets in and consider long term grommets.



Can I get my ears wet?

We would recommend keeping your ears dry for the first couple of weeks. You can start swimming a couple of weeks after the procedure but 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 you can use earplugs. 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 I need off work?

If you have not required a general anaesthetic you can go back to work the same day. If you have a general anaesthetic you will need 24 hours off work.

What else should I know about grommets?

It is okay 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 hearing after grommets have been put in, to make sure your hearing is better; this is usually about six weeks after the surgery.

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If you would like this leaflet in email form, large print, braille or another language, please contact the Patient Support and Complaints team on 01225 825656.