PE TUBE INSERTION

EAR TUBES: Ear tubes are known by several names: tympanostomy tubes, ventilating tubes, pressure equalizing tubes or most frequently, PE tubes. They are tiny hollow tubes made of a soft material. PE tubes decrease the frequency of ear infections by allowing air in and helping fluid to drain into the throat. Preventing fluid from staying in the middle ear can help to restore and preserve normal hearing. The small tubes that are used do not cause hearing loss or long term damage to the ear drum.

THE SURGERY: PE tubes are inserted under general anesthesia as an outpatient. A microscope is used to see into the ear and a small incision is made in the ear drum. Any fluid or infection present in the middle ear is suctioned and the tube is placed into the incision where it remains without the use of stitches.

POST-OPERATIVE CARE: Most children are back to normal within a few hours of surgery. Generally, children do not have any post-operative pain. If your child is fussy or runs a fever, give antihistamine (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin) every four hours. Some children experience nausea and vomiting from the general anesthetic. This should resolve within a few hours. Begin a clear liquid diet, progress to a light diet and progress to a normal diet as your child feels like eating. Please call the office nurse if nausea and vomiting continues for more than 12-24 hours.

POST-OPERATIVE DRAINAGE: Since an opening into the middle ear has been created, there may be drainage of middle ear fluid. The drainage may be clear, a yellow, orange, green, brown, pink or bloody. There may be a small amount of crusty drainage, drainage in the ear canal, or drainage dripping from the ear. Ear drops may be given to use after surgery. In some children, these drops may cause burning sensation. Stop the drops if your child is unable to tolerate them. You can warm the drops before use by placing them in your pocket or rolling them in your hands.

HEARING: Many children experience an immediate improvement in hearing after the fluid is removed from the middle ear and PE tubes have been inserted. This may cause a child to be frightened by normal sounds because they may seem loud. Children usually adjust quickly to these louder sounds.
PROTECTION OF EARS FROM WATER: After PE tubes are inserted, prevent dirty water from entering the ear canals. Dirty water can carry bacteria into the middle ear through the tube and cause ear infection. Dirty water includes lake, river, ocean, non-chlorinated water, and excessively soapy and dirty bathtub water. Dirty water should be avoided or children should wear silicone ear putty or pro-plugs when exposed to dirty water. These should be placed in the outer ear to block the ear canal, but not directly into the canal itself. There is generally no need for ear protection for bathing, showering, or swimming in chlorinated water. When bathing, hair should be rinsed with fresh water from the tap. If the head is completely submerged in the bathtub, ear plugs should be worn. In specific cases, different instructions may be given. Pro plugs are available at all office locations. Silicone ear putty is available at most major pharmacies.

EAR INFECTIONS: PE tubes will prevent ear infections from developing most of the time. However, some children with tubes develop an ear infection despite the tubes. Children with tubes will usually have drainage from the ear with an infection. The drainage may be clear, yellow, orange, green, brown, pink, or bloody. Your doctor will give you a prescription for ear drops to keep on hand. If your child develops ear drainage, use the drops as directed and notify our office the next business day, so that we may update our records. If needed, pain medications such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) may be given. If you do not have a prescription or have run out of drops, call the office nurse during normal office hours (M-F 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.) for a prescription. Over the weekends and holidays, the doctor on call can be reached through the main office number 615-936-8176. Please call the office nurse if the ear drainage does not resolve in seven days, or if there is significant pain or swelling of the ear canal.

REJECTION OF THE TUBES: Because the PE tube is foreign material to the body, the tube will eventually be rejected or pushed out of the ear drum. Depending on the type of tube, this will most often occur six to twelve months after the tube is placed. Most children will not need a second set of ear tubes. Usually by the time the tubes have fallen out, the children have outgrown the need for tubes. Approximately 15% of children will need another set of tubes to be inserted.

FOLLOW-UP: A postoperative appointment is needed in two to three weeks after surgery and then periodically until the PE tubes are out or until your child no longer has problems with ear infections. These visits are to check the status of the PE tubes and to evaluate the condition of the eardrum. If there are problems or questions, call the office nurse.

MOST EAR PROBLEMS CAN BE DEALT WITH DURING OUR NORMAL OFFICE HOURS. IF YOU FEEL YOU ARE UNABLE TO WAIT, CONTACT OUR OFFICE AT 615-936-8176 AND ASK FOR THE ENT RESIDENT ON CALL.