



Family Education Handout

Eustachian Tube Dysfunction

What is the Eustachian tube?

The Eustachian tube is a structure located behind the eardrum that connects the middle ear to the back of the nose. Its job is to open and close in order to regulate pressure on each side of the eardrum.

What is Eustachian tube dysfunction?

Eustachian tube dysfunction, or ETD, is a result of the Eustachian tube's failure to open. This causes pressure to build up, which can cause pain, temporary hearing impairment, dizziness, and ringing in the ears. If the pressure build up is not corrected, it could result in fluid accumulation in the middle ear which may in turn become infected, requiring antibiotics.

What causes ETD?

There are several causes of ETD, including:

- Upper respiratory infections
- Allergies
- Deviated septum
- Changes in air pressure, such as when flying or diving

What are the symptoms of ETD?

- Ear pain
- Temporary hearing impairment, muffled sounds
- Feeling of "fullness" in the ear
- Ringing, popping, or clicking noises in the ear

How is ETD treated?

ETD symptoms usually resolve in 6-8 weeks without intervention.

Afrin (oxymetazoline) is often used in combination with Sudafed (pseudoephedrine) to treat ETD. Afrin can be used intranasally for up to 3 days at a time and Sudafed can be taken daily. Patients must wait 5-7 days between courses of Afrin.

Patients can try opening their Eustachian tube by one of the following methods:

1. Open your mouth about half an inch, push the tongue to the roof of the mouth, and then swallow while holding that position.
2. Pinch your nose shut, take air in through your mouth, and then try to blow the air out of your nose while keeping your nose pinched.

If symptoms are not relieved by these treatments, talk to your doctor to discuss other options such as making a small incision into the eardrum in order to drain the fluid and equalize pressure.