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## **Pediatric Otolaryngology**

### **Ear Infections with Tubes: A Guide to Ear Drainage**

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Throughout the life of the tubes your child may experience drainage from one or both ears. The drainage, called **otorrhea**, may be thin and watery or thick, mucousy and sticky. It may vary in color from white to yellow or green and may contain blood. It can be quite copious and foul smelling and certainly is unsightly. Think of the discharge as "an ear with a cold". Generally ear drainage with tubes is not harmful or dangerous to your child's ears or hearing. Sometimes your child may complain of the ear bothering him/her and sometimes there will be no discomfort with the drainage.

There are two main causes for ear drainage. The first and most common is that there is an ear infection similar to the ear problems that led to placement of the tubes. In this case the tube is in place, functioning appropriately and doing its job to drain out the fluid caused by the infection. The second cause for drainage, called **granulation tissue** is due to infection around the tube itself and is not related to the type of infection your child originally experienced. This type of drainage can be bloody but is not dangerous. .

Ear drainage when a tube is present is most commonly treated by the use of prescription ear drops and does not typically require the use of an oral antibiotic. Unless specifically instructed by your ENT, the only two types of drops you should use when your child's ear tubes are in place are CIPRODEX or FLOXIN. These two drops are the only drops currently approved by the FDA for use in patients with tubes or a hole in the ear drum.

If you see any drainage or crust in or around your child's ear(s), please use either the prescribed Ciprodex or Floxin ear drops:

#### **5 drops to the affected ear only, 2 times a day for 7 days**

Please clean the ear gently with a tissue or washcloth before instilling the drops. Fill the canal with the medication and gently "pump" the small flap of skin in front of the ear a few times to promote the drops getting down the ear canal. Whenever you are treating an ear infection with drops you must be careful about getting water into the ear.

#### **When to Call The Office:**

If the drainage resolves with the drops routine follow up (every 6-9 months to check the tubes) is all that is necessary. If the discharge ***persists or rapidly recurs***, please contact the triage nurse at: (858) 309-7706.

#### **Water Precautions with Ear Tubes**

In the past children with ear tubes were recommended to use water precautions when bathing or swimming. This approach has changed in the last ten years and routine use of water precautions is not necessary in the majority of cases. (The exception being when there is active drainage from the ear). If your ENT doctor suggests the use of ear plugs, there are several options available.

- [www.earplugsonline.com](http://www.earplugsonline.com)
- Ear Putty- available at most local drug stores or pharmacies
- Custom-made molds- available through Children's Speech and Hearing Department. Please note: These molds are NOT covered by insurance and require an appointment to make.
- Ear bands are available at [www.earband-it.com](http://www.earband-it.com)
- **Ear Dryer:**

*In affiliation with the University of California, San Diego*