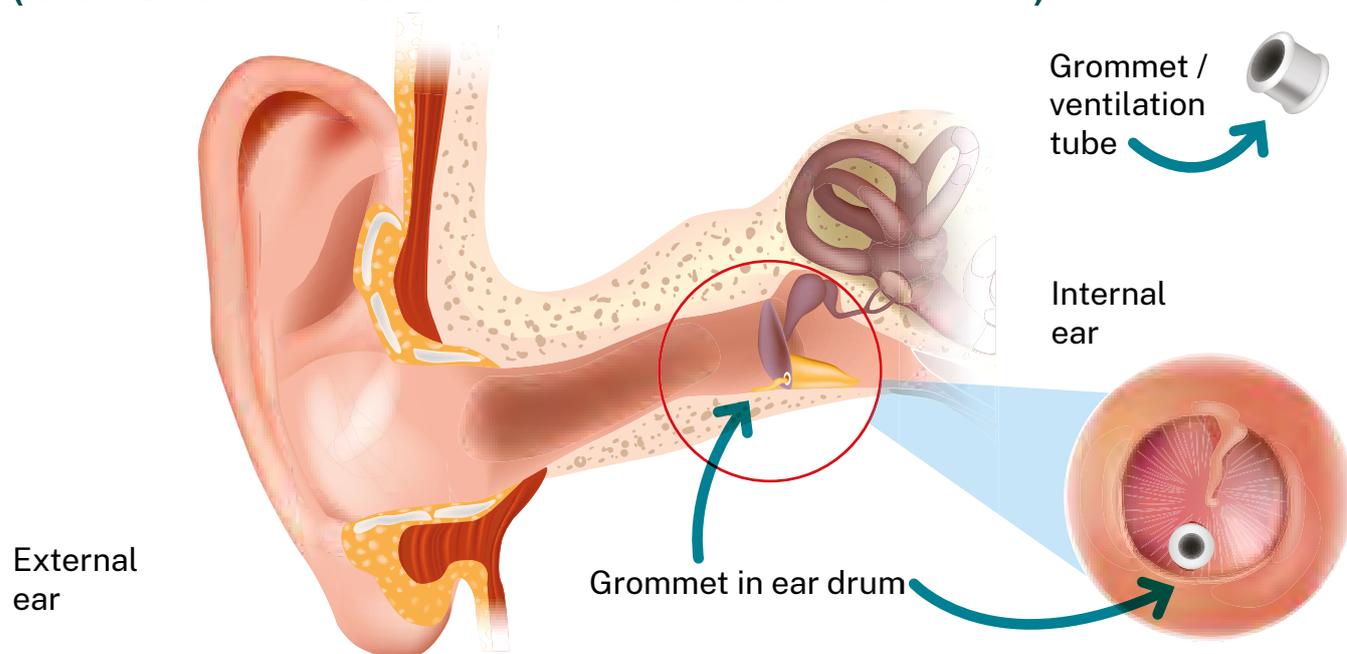


Grommets

(Ventilation tubes for the middle ear)



July 2025

What is a grommet?

A 'grommet' may also be called a ventilation tube or tympanostomy tube

Grommets are small plastic or metal tubes that go into the eardrum. They allow fresh air into the middle ear.

They come in different shapes and sizes. The most common grommet for children looks a bit like a cotton reel.

Why are grommets inserted?

Fluid in the middle ear (glue ear) can cause hearing loss. This affects speech and language development as well as learning. Inserting grommets will improve hearing.

What happens during the operation?

This is a day surgery procedure by an Ear Nose and Throat (ENT) specialist.

- An anaesthetist (specialist doctor) will give your child a general anaesthetic. They will go into a deep sleep and not feel anything.
- The ENT specialist will make a tiny cut in the eardrum.
- The fluid behind the eardrum is drained out of the ear.
- The grommet is placed in the eardrum. This does not hurt.
- Sometimes the adenoids (tissue at the back of the nose that can become swollen) are removed to improve middle ear drainage.

Contact your local Community Health Centre to book a hearing test

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What happens after the grommets are put in?

Hearing should improve straight away. While the grommets are in place and not blocked, hearing levels should be normal. The grommets will fall out on their own after 6–12 months. The length of time depends on the type of grommet used. The grommet will fall into the ear canal and the small hole in the eardrum heals quickly.

Are there any risks of having grommets?

Common complications are:

- Risk of infection if water gets into the middle ear (check with your child's surgeon on how to keep the ears dry).
- While the grommet is in place, thick middle ear fluid can block the tube. You may need to visit your doctor to get some eardrops to clear the tube.

Will one set of grommets be enough?

Sometimes, if infection keeps happening after the grommets fall out, another set may be needed. Your Ear Nose and Throat specialist will discuss this with you.

What happens if nothing is done?

Sometimes glue ear gets better without surgery.

If young children keep getting glue ear many times, they may not learn to talk properly. They can also have difficulties learning at school.

The medical conditions that can develop from glue ear may cause lasting damage to parts of the ear. This could result in permanent hearing loss.

Discuss the management of ear problems with your general practitioner (GP) or hearing health professional.