

## **PETs (Pressure Equalizing Tubes)**

### **What is the Eustachian tube?**

The Eustachian tube is a small tube in the head that connects the back of the nose and the middle of the ear. It functions in allowing the pressure from the outside atmosphere to equal the pressure in the ear. This is important in normal ear functioning.

### **When is surgery necessary?**

- (1) Surgery is performed to prevent acute recurring ear infections in young children.
- (2) It is performed when chronic fluid builds up behind their eardrums from the tube not functioning well. These children will have hearing loss. Hearing is especially important in children as they are still developing speech and language skills.

### **What is done at surgery?**

Tiny plastic and/or metal tubes are placed in the eardrum after a small cut is made to fit them. Any fluid behind the eardrum is suctioned out.

### **What can I expect after surgery?**

- (1) Children usually tolerate this procedure extremely well. They may be mildly irritable for a day or so. Pain is typically treatable with children's Tylenol. Antibiotic eardrops are usually prescribed for 3 to 5 days after, in order to prevent and treat infection and keep the ear tubes open.
- (2) Drainage from the ears after surgery may occur for several days. It is likely associated with the fluid behind the eardrum from before. If it happens much later, it may be a sign of an ear infection. Children will still get earache and infection from time to time. Some mild blood drainage can be expected afterward. It should not last for longer than 1 or 2 days. Water should be kept out of the ears as much as possible. Showering is fine, but avoid bathing in soapy water or swimming a foot and a half below water. Loud noises may startle children who have had fluid in their ears for a long period. Their hearing will be checked after surgery anywhere from 1 to 3 months later.
- (3) A persistent hole in the eardrum may result after the tubes have fallen out (less than 5%). Other times there may be scarring, ingrowth of skin, and formation of a skin cyst called cholesteatoma. Your doctor will check for these at regular intervals until the tubes fall out. The tubes will last from 6 to 18 months, depending on the type of tube and the individual. In 1 out of 5 patients, the ear tubes will require replacement after they have fallen out.