



My child has glue ear

Glue ear – also known as ‘Otitis Media with Effusion (OME)’ - is a build-up of fluid inside the middle ear which prevents the ear drum from moving freely. This stops sound from passing through the ear as well as it should, causing hearing loss in 1 or both ears.

Because glue ear causes temporary hearing loss, it can have several knock-on effects, such as delayed speech, language and communication development, and have an impact on children’s behaviour and educational progress. Children with glue ear may fall behind at school and become disruptive if the condition goes undiagnosed and untreated.

What causes glue ear?

- Colds and flu, allergies and passive smoking can all contribute to glue ear. Children with cleft lip and palate, or with genetic conditions such as Down’s syndrome, may be more likely to get glue ear. Glue ear is often associated with a heavy cold and will clear up when the congestion from the cold has gone.

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For additional Parent Tips see www.ihv.org.uk

The information in this resource was updated on 06/04/2022.

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Treating glue ear

- If you have any concerns about your child's hearing, you should mention these to your health visitor or GP. Your GP will examine your child's ear using an otoscope to find out if there are any changes to the ear drum that suggest glue ear. If glue ear is diagnosed, your GP may not treat it straight away as glue ear often clears up on its own without treatment within 3 months. This is because there is no medication which helps treat glue ear. However, your GP may prescribe antibiotics if they think the ear is infected.
- Your GP may monitor your child for up to one year, to see if the symptoms change, before they consider referral to other services or for treatment.
- If you are asked to wait but your child's condition doesn't seem to be getting better after a period of about 3 months, or if you're worried about the glue ear affecting your child's speech, language and communication or causing problems at school, you should see your GP again and ask about a referral to an ENT (Ear, Nose and Throat) specialist.
- If your child has Down's syndrome or a cleft lip and palate, then your GP will refer you to a specialist more quickly. This is because glue ear is less likely to clear up on its own for children with these conditions.

Helping your child hear

- If your child has glue ear (or any condition that affects their hearing), it's important to support them at home while they receive the right treatment to restore their hearing. Get your child's attention before you start talking and make sure you face your child as much as possible, keeping close eye contact. Check that background noise is kept to a minimum, speak clearly without shouting, and maintain your normal rhythm of speech. It's also important that you tell your child's teacher about their impaired hearing so that they can support your child and arrange appropriate help at school.

Grommets

- Grommets are tiny plastic tubes that are put into the eardrum and are often used to treat glue ear. Grommets are inserted into the ear during a short operation at hospital under general anaesthetic. They allow air to circulate and help stop more fluid from building up so your child's full hearing is restored. Grommets usually stay in until the eardrum has healed and they fall out naturally as your child's ear heals, usually within 6-12 months of the operation.
- To help your child understand what grommets are for and why they need them, take a look at the National Deaf Children's Society's (NDCS) Harvey Gets Grommets comic for children, available: <https://bit.ly/3x8AQXo>. You can also find information on the Great Ormond Street Hospital website about grommets, available: <https://bit.ly/3KeMO5t>.
- Sometimes, children need to have grommets inserted again if the glue ear returns (around 1 in 3 children will need further grommets).

Hearing aids

- Another treatment option – often recommended for children who are likely to have glue ear for long periods of time and when repeated grommet surgery may not be recommended (such as those with Down's syndrome) – is temporary hearing aids, which work by amplifying sounds going into the ear.
- They are also used where children are unable or unwilling to have surgery.
- You can read more information on hearing aids on the NHS Choices website: <https://bit.ly/3IZUGXO>

Further information:

Visit NHS Choices for additional information on glue ear here: <https://bit.ly/3tKLD6L>

You can also download a comprehensive guide about glue ear from the NDCS (National Deaf Children's Society) website. The guide is available in several languages including Welsh, Urdu and Polish: <https://bit.ly/3pSR0PQ>

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