



Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry & Health Sciences

Melbourne Audiology & Speech Pathology Clinic



Middle Ear Fluid (glue ear)

SIGNS OF MIDDLE EAR FLUID

Does your child need repeats? Do they sometimes appear to be ignoring you? Have they had changes in behaviour or seem to be tiring easily? Do you have concerns about their speech development?

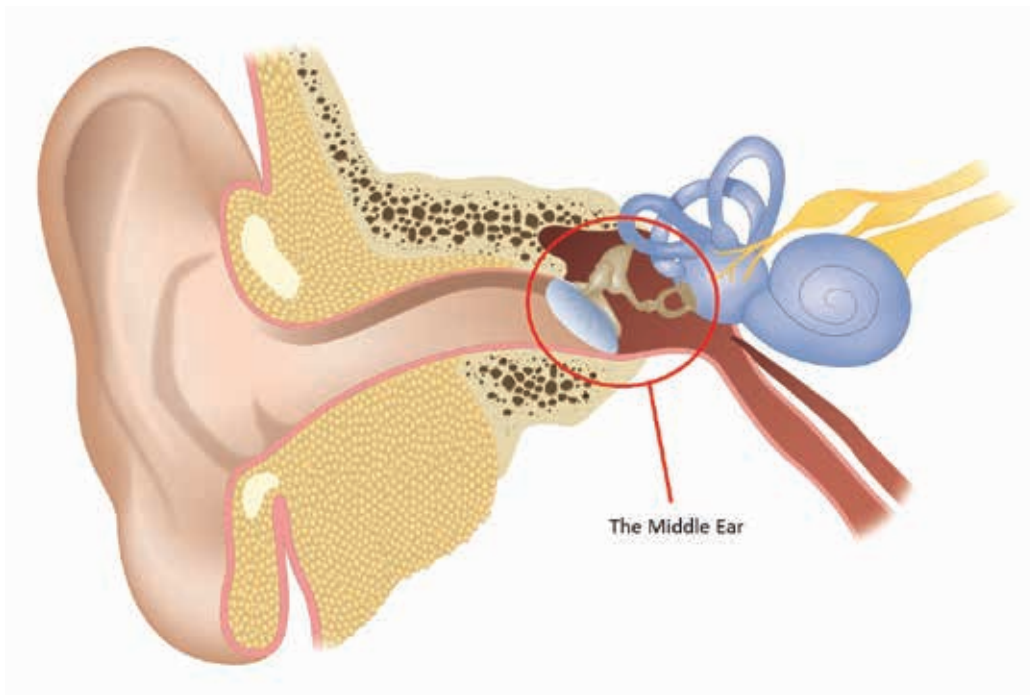
WHAT IS MIDDLE EAR FLUID?

Middle ear fluid is common in childhood. It mainly occurs in children under the age of seven, although it can persist into adolescence. The fluid sits behind the ear drum and may cause a temporary hearing loss. This hearing loss can affect speech development in young children and can also impact on a child's behaviour as well as potentially affecting longer-term educational progress.

WHAT CAUSES MIDDLE EAR FLUID?

For ears to work properly, the middle ear needs to be full of air. The Eustachian tube, which usually does this, joins the middle ear to the back of the nose. In children, the Eustachian tube does not work as efficiently as it does in adults. If the Eustachian tube becomes blocked, air cannot enter the middle ear. The blockage can occur for a number of reasons and is not always linked to an ear infection.

When there is no air behind the ear drum, runny liquid builds up. The longer the fluid stays trapped in the middle ear, the thicker and more 'glue' like it becomes. If the fluid stays in the middle ear, it becomes harder for the sound to pass through to the inner ear. This can make quieter sounds difficult to hear.



WHAT TREATMENTS ARE AVAILABLE?

Often middle ear fluid is associated with a heavy cold and will clear up when the cold has gone. If there is any sign of ear infection, it is recommended that you consult your GP so appropriate treatment can be made.

Your Audiologist will be able to identify whether fluid is present and whether it is affecting your child's hearing. It is a good idea to monitor the fluid so a review will be advised in a few months. For most children the fluid will clear up in this time. If the fluid persists, you may be recommended to see an Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) specialist to consider treatment.

GROMMETS

Grommets are tiny plastic tubes that are placed in the eardrum by an ENT specialist. This is done under general anaesthetic. The procedure involves the draining of fluid and the insertion of grommets. The grommets allow the air to circulate in the middle ear and stop the build-up of more fluid. Grommets usually stay in for 6-12 months and then fall out by themselves. Sometimes if the fluid returns, another set of grommets may be considered. If your child has grommets, it is important to keep water out of the ears to avoid infection.

HOW CAN I MAKE HEARING EASIER FOR MY CHILD?

When middle ear fluid is identified, it is important that parents and teachers know how it can affect children's hearing.

Some tips that can help make listening easier for your child:

- Get your child's attention before you start talking.
- Make sure you face your child as much as possible, and keep eye contact.
- Avoid talking to your child from a distance.
- Keep background noise to a minimum.
- Speak clearly and check that your child has understood what you have said.
- Tell your child's teacher so that arrangements can be made in school to help. Your child should sit near the teacher and should be encouraged to ask for repeats.

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