

# Your child's grommet surgery

**This leaflet is about your child's grommet surgery. Grommets are small tubes that we put in your child's ear during the procedure to treat a build-up of fluid behind their eardrum. The leaflet explains what you should do before your child's procedure, on the day of the procedure and when you return home.**

## Your child's condition and procedure

### **Why does my child need grommets?**

Your child needs grommets because they have temporary hearing loss caused by glue ear or keep getting ear infections. Glue ear is when sticky fluid builds up in your child's middle ear instead of air. It can affect one or both ears and is a common childhood illness.

We can put small tubes called grommets into your child's eardrum. They allow air to pass through the eardrum and out of the middle ear. This keeps the ear healthy and prevents fluid from gathering there again.

We talk to you in advance at our clinic about the reasons for your child's surgery. Your child usually has a hearing test before the procedure.

### **Are there any other treatment options to this procedure?**

The main other treatment option for children with hearing problems because of glue ear is a hearing aid. This is not effective for ear infections.

If your child keeps getting ear infections, another option is taking antibiotics to treat each infection. Your child could have a longer course of antibiotics to try to break the cycle of infections.

## Before your child's procedure

### **What needs to happen before my child's procedure?**

We need to see your child at a pre-admission clinic. This clinic may take place face to face or online. We make sure that your child is ready for an anaesthetic, which is a medicine to make them sleep during the procedure, and surgery.

After the pre-admission clinic, our admissions team contacts you by letter, text message or phone. We offer you a date for your child's procedure. We also explain when your child should stop eating and drinking (fast) before their procedure.

### **Do I need to get pain medicine ready for my child?**

Please make sure that you have a week's supply of paracetamol (a painkiller) and ibuprofen (an anti-inflammatory medicine) at home before the procedure. We do not routinely give these medicines to take home for your child after day surgery.

You can buy paracetamol and ibuprofen from a pharmacy, supermarket or shop. Paracetamol for children may also be called Calpol®. Ibuprofen for children may also be called Calprofen® or Nurofen®. You need the type of medicine that you would give your child if they were unwell with

a cold or ear ache. If your child cannot take paracetamol or ibuprofen for any reason, please speak to their healthcare team about other options.

## On the day of the procedure

### When you arrive at the children's day surgery unit

We give you a time to arrive at the Evelina London children's day surgery unit. It is important that you arrive at the correct time and have followed the fasting instructions for your child. If you arrive late or have not followed the fasting instructions, we may not be able to do the procedure.

You and your child meet the surgical and anaesthetic teams on the admissions ward before the procedure. We confirm that you have given your permission (consent) for the procedure. You can ask us any questions that you may have.

### During the procedure

We give your child a general anaesthetic. This is a medicine that makes your child sleep and stops them feeling any pain during the procedure. You can stay with your child until they are asleep. Please see our separate leaflet called "Your child's general anaesthetic" for details.

When your child is asleep, the surgeon looks into their ear, removes any wax and makes a small hole in the eardrum. This process is called myringotomy and allows fluid that is trapped in the middle ear to drain away. The surgeon uses an instrument to suck extra fluid out of the ear. They then put a grommet into the hole.

We do the procedure through the tube from the outer ear to the middle ear (the ear canal). This means that there are no cuts to see on the outside of your child's ear.

### Are there any risks to my child's procedure?

Every procedure has some risks of complications. To reduce these risks, we make sure that your child is well at the time of the procedure. We talk to you about the risks in the clinic and before the procedure when we confirm that we have your consent.

The specific risks of grommet surgery are as follows:

- **Bleeding after the procedure**

It is common for there to be a very small amount of bleeding from the ear after the procedure.

- **Infection**

It is common to have a small amount of clear leaking fluid (discharge) from the ear for 2 or 3 days after the procedure. The discharge is sometimes mixed with a little blood. Any discharge that continues for longer than this, is green or has a bad smell may be a sign of infection. This can usually be treated with antibiotic eardrops from your child's GP.

- **A small hole in the eardrum (perforated eardrum)**

The grommets usually last between 6 and 18 months and fall out by themselves. In most cases, your child's eardrum heals in the place where a grommet falls out. However, in about 1 out of 100 cases (1%), the hole left behind does not heal on its own.

We may need to do another procedure to close a small hole that has been left in the eardrum. Usually, we wait until children are 8 to 10 years old and no longer have any problems with glue ear before doing this procedure.

Grommets are not painful when they fall out. You and your child do not usually notice when this happens.

## After your child's procedure

### **How will my child look and feel after their procedure?**

Your child may feel drowsy after their surgery and sleep for a while. They may be restless (agitated) and upset for up to an hour after waking up from the procedure. Some children may have a sore throat and feel or be sick (vomit), but this is not common.

During the procedure, we give your child plenty of effective painkillers.

### **Will my child be in pain after their procedure?**

There is usually no pain or only mild pain after grommet surgery. If your child is in any pain, we may give them paracetamol, ibuprofen or both medicines. You can continue to give your child these medicines as needed when they are at home. However, your child needs little pain relief.

### **When can my child eat and drink or feed after their procedure?**

Your child should be able to eat and drink or feed as usual within 1 to 2 hours of the procedure.

### **Do we see the surgeon after my child's procedure?**

You see the surgeon or a member of their team after the procedure. They explain:

- if the procedure was successful
- how to care for your child after the procedure
- the arrangements for your child's follow-up care

### **When can my child go home?**

Your child can go home on the same day as their procedure when they:

- feel comfortable
- can manage (tolerate) their usual food and drink
- are not feeling sick (nausea) or being sick (vomiting)
- are behaving as they usually do

This is usually within 2 hours of the procedure.

Please supervise your child carefully on the journey home. According to the sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) guidelines, it is best to avoid long car journeys for babies under 1 year of age. If you travel home by car, it is important that:

- you stop for frequent breaks to feed your baby and change their position
- an adult sits with the baby in the back of the car

Try to avoid making your child walk long distances on the journey home because this may cause more swelling.

## After you go home

### **How do I care for my child's ears after their procedure?**

Your child needs to avoid swimming for 2 weeks after grommet surgery. After this, it is best for them to wear swim earplugs with a hat or ear band for swimming and to avoid diving.

When your child's hair is washed, they need to either:

- wear swim earplugs
- have cotton wool in their outer ears with some Vaseline® (petroleum jelly) over the top to help make it waterproof

It is important to follow this advice until your child's grommets have come out and the eardrum has healed. The ear, nose and throat (ENT) team tells you in the clinic when this has happened.

It is fine for your child to travel by aeroplane after grommet surgery.

### How can I manage my child's pain after their procedure?

Grommet surgery is not usually a painful procedure.

If your child is in any pain, we recommend giving them paracetamol and ibuprofen regularly for 2 days and then as needed. Please remember to buy these medicines before the day of your child's procedure. It is also important to make sure that your child drinks plenty of fluids.

It is safe to give the 2 medicines at the same time, ideally with food. This is easier to plan and the medicines work in different ways. You can give your child:

- 1 recommended amount (dose) of paracetamol every 4 to 6 hours and no more than 4 doses in 24 hours
- 1 dose of ibuprofen every 6 to 8 hours and no more than 3 doses in 24 hours

You may find the following chart helpful to keep track of your child's medicines.

### Home medicine chart for parents

Medicine	Time to give	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Paracetamol								
Ibuprofen								

## Do I need to look for any symptoms after my child's procedure?

Some children have a slightly high temperature after their procedure, but this usually settles. It is important to check there are no signs of other problems, such as a chest or urine infection. If you have any concerns, you need to get advice from a GP or go to your nearest emergency department (A&E).

Discharge from the ear that lasts longer than 2 to 3 days, or is green or smelly, can be a sign of infection. In this case, please contact your child's GP. They can prescribe antibiotic eardrops.

## Do you see my child again after their procedure?

We may give you a date for a follow-up appointment while you are still in the children's day surgery unit. It is most likely that you will hear from our team in the next few days.

The ear, nose and throat (ENT) team organises a follow-up appointment for your child about 3 months after their procedure. This appointment takes place face to face in our clinic or by phone. Your child has another hearing test before or on the day of the follow-up appointment.

After this, your child has appointments at intervals until the grommets have come out and their eardrum has healed. The glue ear can return and need more treatment, including another set of grommets.

### Contact us

If you **cannot keep your appointment**, contact our admissions team  
**phone** 020 7188 9098, **email** [gst-tr.paediatricadmissions@nhs.net](mailto:gst-tr.paediatricadmissions@nhs.net)

If your child has a **cough, cold or high temperature** in the 2 weeks before the procedure, contact our pre-assessment team, **phone** 020 7188 7188 extension 58209

If you have any **concerns between 7am and 9pm** about your child's surgery, call the children's day surgery unit, **phone** 020 7188 5300

If you have any **concerns between 9pm and 7am** about your child's surgery, call the Savannah ward through the main switchboard, **phone** 020 7188 7188

If you have any **concerns from 24 hours after surgery** about your child's health, contact your child's specialist surgical team or GP surgery, or **phone** NHS 111

If you are concerned that your child is **seriously unwell** at any time, go to your nearest A&E or **phone** 999

For more information on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit **web** [www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/leaflets)



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