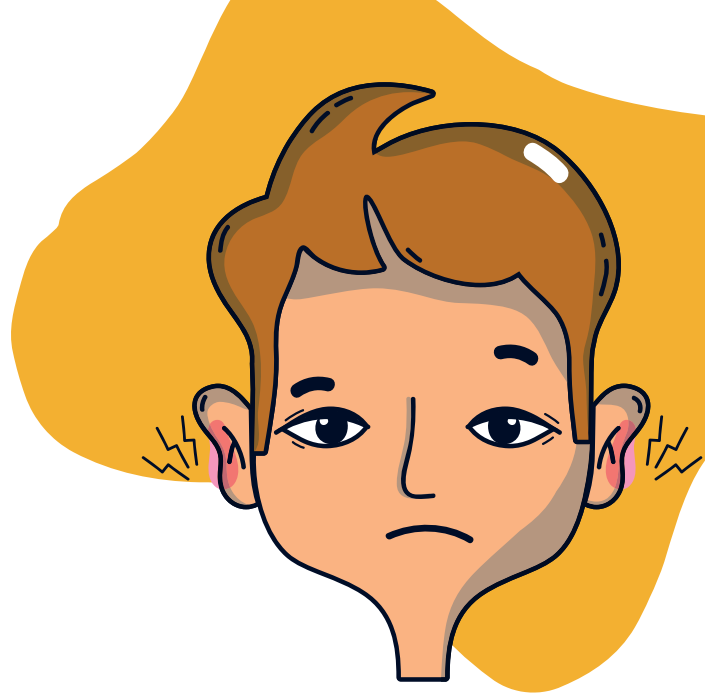




WHAT IS OME?

Otitis Media with Effusion (OME) or “glue ear” is when the middle ear (inside of the ear drum) is full of fluid. OME often occurs after an upper respiratory tract infection (a cold) or an ear infection. It results in the “blocked” sensation in the ear, pulling at the ear, discomfort, hearing loss and eventually delayed language development if persistent. Fluid in the ear (OME) can come and go, and thus the symptoms fluctuate.



WHAT CAUSES OME?

OME often occurs after an upper respiratory tract infection or an ear infection. The lining of the ear produces fluid. This normally drains down the eustachian tube to the nasopharynx (back of the nose). The eustachian tube's function is affected by the age of the patient (children's eustachian is “flatter” than adults), the adenoids (these are in the nasopharynx, can be large in children and can act as a reservoir for infection) and other conditions such as cleft palate. If the fluid can't drain down the eustachian tube, it remains in the middle ear as OME.

WHAT HAPPENS TO MY CHILD'S EAR IF HE/SHE HAS OME?

OME or the fluid in the middle ear can fluctuate. In most cases it will spontaneously resolve, however if the fluid is persistent for more than 3 months, spontaneous resolution is unlikely to occur.

OME results in hearing loss that can vary from mild to moderate. Prolonged OME and thus hearing loss, leads to delayed development of speech in children. If OME is untreated for several years, then irreversible changes can occur, resulting in permanent hearing loss.

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT OF OME?

As most cases of OME spontaneously resolve, active observation is often all that is required. This could involve examination of the ear by your doctor, and potentially a hearing test and referral to an ENT surgeon if there is significant concern.

However, if the OME has been persistent for more than 3 months, or if there are concerns regarding language development, then your ENT surgeon may recommend “grommets”.

DO I NEED A HEARING TEST?

If you or your child has any of the following, then it is recommended to undertake a hearing test.

- ✓ Symptoms suggestive of hearing loss i.e. trouble hearing from a distance or in noisy environments and TV volume turned up
- ✓ Complete hearing loss in one or both ears
- ✓ Severe dizziness ie vertigo (the world spinning)
- ✓ Speech delay
- ✓ attention deficits or behavioural concerns that could be related to poor hearing
- ✓ Recurrent ear infections

If the hearing test is abnormal, discuss the results with your GP and potentially a referral to an ENT surgeon.