

Bruce R. Maddern M.D., P.A.

Ear Drainage (Otorrhea) Instructions

Ear infections continue to occur with increasing frequency despite our best efforts with options such as antibiotics, immunizations, and ear tubes. Ear infections can occur with a tube in place; this is called otorrhea. These incidents usually coincide with episodes of acute upper respiratory infection or nasal congestion. A patient with an ear tube should have infrequent ear drainage/infections, with an average of once or twice every 1-2 years. Unfortunately, otorrhea is occurring more often due to new problems with bacteria that are resistant to antibiotics (“superbugs”) and limited choices of oral antibiotics that are approved for use in children. If ear drainage occurs some suggestions and possible alternatives to care are listed below.

- Ear drops are used for a variety of reasons (cleaning, wax control, treat infection, etc.). Do not use any drops in the ears unless approved by your physician. Some preparations are more harmful than helpful.
- Antibiotic eardrops can treat ear discharge or an ear infection. Usually a short 3-5 day course is sufficient to treat most drainage. Be sure to clean the ear before using the antibiotic drops if instructed to do so. Overuse of drops can lead to resistant bacteria, yeast, or worse infections and drainage. An oral antibiotic or visit to your primary doctor may or may not be required in addition to the drops depending on other symptoms that may be occurring with your child.
- Ear discharge usually appears as yellow or bloody mucous, possibly with an odor. There may be some pain or redness of the ear canal.
- The ear canal can be cleaned using the instructions found under the heading “EAR CANAL CLEANING”.
- If the ear discharge is thick or persistent it may require suctioning in the physician’s office. Suctioning discharge from the ear may help clear debris from the ear canal and open the tube. This is a noisy but not painful procedure done in the office. This will help to allow delivery of medications down the ear.
- If needed, a sample of the ear discharge can be sent to the laboratory for an ear culture. Results usually take 2-3 business days. Oral antibiotics and/or ear drops may be prescribed based on these tests.
- Occasionally, eye drops are used in the ears. DO NOT put any drops in your child’s ear unless instructed to do so by a physician.
- If you have any questions about how to care for about how to care for your child’s draining ear please call the office at (904) 398-5437.

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