

Glue Ear / Fluid in the Ear

Glue ear is also known as “fluid in the ear”.

It is very common in children under 7 years old.

80% of the time, it goes away by itself in 3 months.

Some people need grommets to treat glue ear. An Ear, Nose, and Throat Surgeon can help you decide if your child needs grommets (see grommets information sheet).

What is glue ear?

- The skin in the ear makes a fluid. This fluid is usually thin, like water. Sometimes this fluid becomes thick, like glue.
- When the fluid is thick, it is called “glue ear”.



How does the “glue” get in the ear?

- The ear is joined to the nose by a tube. This tube opens when we yawn or swallow. When it opens, it lets air into the ear. This helps some of the fluid dry.
- If this tube is blocked, air cannot get into the ear. The fluid will get thick because it cannot dry.
- The tube can be blocked when your child has a blocked or runny nose.

Can you get the “glue” from baths or swims?

- No! The fluid is made by the ear.
- Water from outside the ear does not become fluid in the ear.

How do children with glue ear hear?

- Glue ear makes hearing go up and down.
- It can be hard for them to hear in noisy places.
- You may have to use a strong, clear voice to talk to them. Do not shout! Shouting makes words hard to hear.
- It can be hard for them to learn to talk

Can glue ear cause a bad mood?

- Yes! Glue ear can make it hard to hear. Children have to work harder to listen. This can make them more tired.
- The ear may be sore. Pain can make a child grumpy.

What can I do?

- Teach them to blow their nose. Try do this 3-4 times a day, even if their nose is not blocked. This can help open the tube that joins the ear to the nose.
- Have their ears checked every 3 months. Your audiologist can tell you if you need to see an Ear, Nose, and Throat surgeon.

If you are worried about your child’s hearing, talk to your doctor about an audiology referral.

