

Eustachian Tube Blockage

Do you have Eustachian Tube Blockage?

In order to hear, we have an ear drum that vibrates with the sound and 3 little bones located in the middle ear that move back and forth in order to transmit the sound to the inner ear where the nerves are. In order for the ear drum and the bones to move properly, the middle ear space has to have a pressure equal to that of the air outside the ear. But if you change altitude, the pressures outside changes and you have to adjust the middle ear pressure. This is done through the Eustachian tube (ET), which connects the middle ear to the nose and the outside. When people blow the nose too hard, this can close the ET. Any nasal congestion, swelling can do this. A growth in the back of the nose can press on this opening too. This is why we are concerned when the ET is blocked on one side without an obvious cause, we must look for the cause. Inhaled toxins can injure the ET system too.

With blockage, patients are aware that they can't hear as well; this is because the closure of the ET causes a vacuum to form in the middle ear that prevents the normal vibration of the ear drum. If this closure persists, the body tries to fill this vacuum and the normal air containing cells of the mastoid bone change to mucous making cells and give a condition called Serous Otitis Media or fluid filling the middle ear.

When the ET is blocked, a nasal decongestant such as Sudafed and Afrin are useful. Proteolytic enzyme preparations with papain and bromelain (make sure you use a formula with calibrated enzyme *activity*) are especially helpful. Drink huge amounts of hot tea. The important thing is to be VERY gentle on trying to clear the ears because you can do more harm by forcing. You may hold the nose and try to gently force air out the ear. Or put your tongue to the top of the mouth and swallow.

Did you know that your ears are connected to your throat?

Your middle ear is a sealed chamber containing tiny bones that transmit sounds to the nerves in your inner ear. When the pressure outside your body changes (like when you drive up a high mountain, or like when the cabin pressure in an airplane changes), a valve in your Eustachian tubes opens, and the pressure is equalized. Many people recommend swallowing or blowing while holding your nose to clear your ears if you have trouble...That's because your sinuses are connected to your Eustachian tube. When your sinuses are blocked, or irritated, your Eustachian tubes can become blocked as well. This is why sinus medication can help you clear your ears. Antihistamines (Chlophenarimine, Entex, ternafidine (Seldane) will help. Also, decongestants as discussed above and nasal steroids can help. You should always take these with you if you have to fly with a cold or allergies. Occasionally, a brief course of systemic steroids are required for the most difficult cases.

If you have a lot of trouble clearing your ears all the time, try this (clearing your ears):

- Practice! Scuba divers LEARN to clear their ears with practice; we are simply conscious of the part of our body that opens the Eustachian tubes, like other people are conscious of their fingers. Try to clear your ears a few times every now and again by blowing *gently* while holding your nose.
- Go ahead and try the old standbys, chewing gum and holding your nose and blowing. These usually work if you keep at it.
- FOR THE SCUBA DIVERS: Same for you, only more important since failure to clear your ears could result in eardrum damage. But WATCH OUT! DO NOT TAKE **an antihistamine that makes you sleepy!** You will get "narced" more easily and have other judgment and performance problems. If you have congestion, take ternafidine (Seldane), or Entex, which don't make you sleepy.

