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Eustachian tube dysfunction

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What is eustachian tube dysfunction?

Unequal pressure between the air in the middle ear (beyond the eardrum) and the outside. It means that the Eustachian tube is failing to equalise the pressure and the ventilation of the middle ear sometimes because of colds, sinus, throat or ear infections; allergies, flying or pressure changes.

What are the symptoms?

The main symptom is muffled or dull hearing, often described as being underwater or ears with cotton wool.

Ear pain can be due to a pressure difference causing the drum to over stretch.

You may also experience fullness in the ear (pressure), tinnitus (ringing), dizziness, popping or clicking noises.

Treatment

If the symptoms are mild usually it will resolve on its own.

Yawn or open your mouth widely as if you were yawning. Eating and drinking may also mobilise the Eustachian tube to allow some air travel through the tube.

Valsalva maneuver can be done to push some air into middle ear, take a deep breath, pinch your nose and close your mouth, and gently pop your ears. Do not be very forceful. Some balloons and autoinflation devices are designed to direct air to the middle ear and promote emptying of middle ear fluid and are available over the counter or online.

Nasal decongestants may be used if there is some blockage. This is available over the counter. GP may prescribe steroid nasal sprays for persistent inflammation.

Steam inhalations with menthol, eucalyptus, or other oils in boiling water in the sink with a towel over the head or any other kind of inhalation device.

Sucking a boiled sweet such as menthol or eucalyptus to unblock the nose.

Taking antihistamines if the swelling is caused by allergies.

If the symptoms persists for over 3 weeks it is advised to see a specialist to investigate it further.