

What happens next?

Grommets usually remain in the eardrum for 6-12 months, and then come out spontaneously. The eardrum is good at healing quickly. Occasionally, the eardrum doesn't heal, and a little hole (perforation) remains. Another operation may be needed to repair it but this will be discussed with ENT.

Do grommets leave a scar?

Usually there is no scar. Sometimes the eardrum is a little thinner at the place the grommet was. Often the eardrum is left with a white "chalky" mark around the edge. Your child will not notice any difference with their hearing and it is not a cause for concern.

Will the glue come back?

Usually the ear gets better, and there is no more trouble, but it may come back. Children tend to get fewer colds and less ear problems as they get older.

Can my child bathe and swim with grommets?

Ears should be kept dry following grommet insertion until hearing has been checked. When bathing ensure your child sits upright in the bath and wash hair with clean water. Wear a shower cap when in the bath and not washing the hair.

Generally, it's OK for your child to go swimming roughly 1-3 weeks after grommets have been put in. Check this with your ENT surgeon. Your child may experience earache or discharge when they go swimming, especially if they like to dive or jump in. If they do, you can buy swim plugs from a chemist or pharmacy. They may work even better with a head band. If your child still has ear issues with swimming, speak to your GP.

Can anything else go wrong?

Discharge (occasionally bloodstained) may occur for a couple of days immediately after the operation. After this time, there should not be any discharge. Sometimes children with grommets get an infection or irritation around the grommet. This causes a discharge or "running" ears. It does not mean that just "glue" is coming out and your child may struggle to hear in that ear.

Gently wipe the discharge dry with a tissue, to try to get air into the ear. If it isn't better after 2 days, it will need treatment. You will need to speak to your GP who may try antibiotic ear drops that usually work within days and/or refer your child back to the ENT consultant.



Providing NHS services

Get in touch

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Bath and North East Somerset,
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Community Health

Service information guide

Grommets

Information for families



What are grommets?

Grommets are small temporary tubes that are placed in your child's ear during surgery. They help the fluid to drain and allow air to pass through the eardrum.

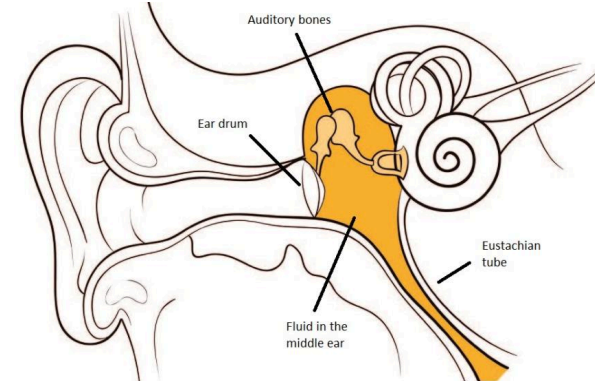
There are several different types of grommets. They are made of plastic and are dumb-bell shaped tubes: narrow in the middle and wider at the ends. They are very small, about the size of the head of a pin. They have a tiny hole through the centre that lets air through.

Often, your child will hear better as soon as they wake up from the anaesthetic. Sometimes it is slower for the improvement to be noticeable - weeks or months.

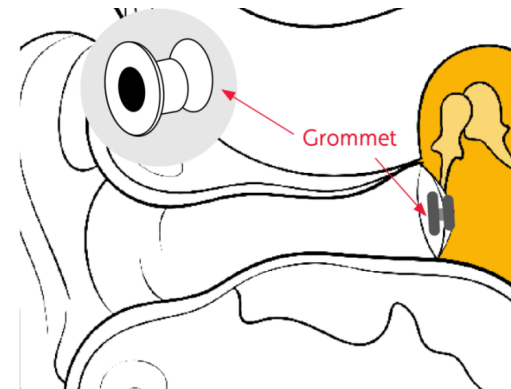
How do grommets work?

During surgery, the fluid behind the eardrum, in the middle ear is suctioned out. Grommets allow air to enter the middle ear. They help to improve your child's hearing by allowing the tiny bones in the middle ear to move freely again. This improves the symptoms your child has been experiencing whilst the glue ear naturally resolves.

Congestion in the middle ear (Glue Ear)



Grommet inserted into the eardrum



Typical timeline for a child to be treated with grommets

If your child has had two audiology appointments over a period of 3 months or longer that have shown at least a mild hearing loss in both ears associated with glue ear, your audiologist will consider management options with you, one of which will be grommets.

If grommets are offered as a management option, your audiologist will then need to document evidence that your child meets the specific criteria for NHS funding for them.

It is important that you understand why your child has been offered grommets, what alternatives are available, and any questions you have about grommets are answered. You will have an opportunity to discuss how the surgery is carried out and the risks involved with a member of the Ear, Nose, Throat team (ENT) before the surgery. You will be asked to provide written informed consent to your child having grommets before the operation.

A date is booked for the grommets to be put in by the Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) team and you will be informed of any specific information including what time to arrive at the hospital. Your child will usually be allowed to go home with you on the same day unless they have any additional health needs which may mean they need a longer stay in hospital.

How are grommets inserted?

Firstly, your child will have a general anaesthetic. This is given by injection in the back of the hand (your child won't feel anything as they put some numbing cream on first). Next, your child goes into the operating theatre. There the surgeon looks in to the ear with a special microscope. They make a little hole in the eardrum, and gently suction out the glue. The grommet is carefully placed in the eardrum so that it fits in the little hole. Usually this only takes about five minutes for each side.

What check-ups will my child have?

About 8 weeks after the grommet operation, you should receive an appointment for a hearing assessment. This is usually at your local Children's Audiology clinic. Sometimes it will need to be with the Ear Nose and Throat team who performed the operation.