



## Otitis Media – Fluid In The Ear

### **What is Otitis Media?**

Otitis media is defined as fluid in the middle ear space (see below for pictures of the ear compartments). This fluid can be present with or without an infection. Otitis media with effusion (OME) is fluid in the ear possibly causing symptoms such as a plugged feeling, ear ringing/buzzing, slight hearing loss and pressure without infection. Acute otitis media (AOM) is fluid that is infected in the middle ear possibly causing symptoms of pain, discharge, inflammation, plugged feeling, ear ringing/buzzing, and slight hearing loss. This occurs in 2.2 million Americans each year, so it is a very common problem

### **What Causes OME?**

Children are more likely to get OME due to the shape of their inner ear and head. In fact, up to 90% of children have an episode of OME before school age (so this is very common). OME is also caused by poor function of the ear drainage system (Eustachian tube). When this drainage system fails, fluid can build up behind the ear drum. This fluid can be clear OR it can become infected. We often like to get hearing tests to see how much this problem is affecting your hearing.

### **How is OME Treated?**

If the ear fluid is NOT infected, OME can be treated in 3 ways. 1) Observation – 90% of patients will have resolution of their ear fluid by 3 months without any treatment. 2) Nasal steroid and popping your ears – this may help the fluid resolve quicker. 3) Myringotomy or Tympanostomy tube placement – this is a procedure in which an incision is made in your ear drum and the fluid is suctioned out. These are often done if this is a recurrent problem or the fluid is significantly affecting your life/work/school. If the fluid is infected, then antibiotics is the treatment of choice.

### **What to Expect After Treatment:**

Your ear may feel plugged for weeks and sometimes this takes months to resolve. If you had a Tympanostomy tube place, your ear may drain for multiple days and you may have a change in your perception of sound for a short while.

If you are experiencing any pain, sudden loss of hearing or ringing, or vertigo, call your physician.