

EUSTACHIAN TUBE DYSFUNCTION

The sinuses are air-filled spaces surrounding the nose. The eustachian tube is a narrow tube that connects the ear to the back of the throat behind the nose. The nose, sinuses, and eustachian tube are all lined by mucosa which can become thick and inflamed during colds, sinus infections, allergies or exposure to smoke and irritants. When the eustachian tube becomes swollen or plugged, there may be a feeling of fullness or popping of the ear and hearing may decrease.

If an infection is present, your doctor may prescribe an antibiotic. Many times, however, the problem is simply swelling and dryness of the mucus rather than a true infection. Under these circumstances, the following tips may be helpful:

1. Make sure your environment is well humidified. In addition, try boiling water and inhaling the steam through your nose and mouth three times a day. Furthermore, a salt-water (saline) spray can be helpful. Use two sprays in each nostril three to four times a day.
2. Decongestant tablets such as Sudafed or Entex may be helpful. These medications and antihistamines may sometimes worsen the problem by thickening and drying mucus which may result in plugging. A nasal decongestant spray may be recommended but should rarely be used for more than 3 days because congestion can actually become worse when using these sprays for long periods of time.
3. If you have eustachian tube problems related to flying, please refer to our handout on "Air Travel and Eustachian Tube Dysfunction."

If you have high blood pressure or other medical problems, contact your primary doctor first. Follow the instructions and precautions on the package of any medications you take.

We hope this information is helpful. Should you have any questions do not hesitate to contact us.