



ANWAR E.N.T.
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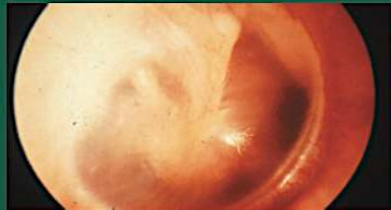
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Perforated Ear Drum

How does the ear work?

The ear consists of the outer, middle and inner ear. Sound travels through the outer ear and reaches the eardrum, causing it to vibrate. The vibration is then transmitted through three tiny bones (ossicles) in the middle ear. The vibration then enters the inner ear where the nerve cells are. The nerve cells within the inner ear are stimulated to produce nerve signals. These nerve signals are carried to the brain, where they are interpreted as sound.



A normal ear drum.



*This patient has a hole in their right ear drum.
The small ossicle bones can be seen through the hole.*

What is a hole in the eardrum?

A hole in the eardrum is known as a "perforation". It can be caused by infection or injury to the eardrum.

Quite often a hole in the eardrum may heal itself. Sometimes it does not cause any problem. However a hole in the eardrum may cause a discharge from the ear. If the hole in the eardrum is large, then the hearing may be reduced.

How is the condition diagnosed?

You will need an examination by an otolaryngologist (ear, nose and throat specialist) to rule out any hidden infection behind the perforation. The hole in the eardrum can be identified using a special medical instrument called 'otoscope'. It consists of a magnifying lens and light. Examination with the otoscope is pain free. The amount of hearing loss can be determined only by careful hearing tests.

A severe hearing loss usually means that the ossicles are not working properly, or the inner ear is damaged.

How can a hole in the eardrum be treated?

If the hole in the eardrum has only just occurred, no treatment may be required. The eardrum may simply heal itself. If an infection is present you may need antibiotics. You should avoid getting water in the ear until the eardrum heals.

A hole in the eardrum that is not causing any problems can be left alone. If the hole in the eardrum is causing discharge or deafness, or if you wish to swim, it may be sensible to have the hole repaired. The operation is called a "myringoplasty". You should discuss with your surgeon whether this surgery is appropriate for you.

Aims of the operation

The benefits of closing a perforation include prevention of water entering the middle ear while showering, bathing or swimming (which could cause ear infection). It can be done as part of a mastoid operation (see leaflet on mastoid surgery).

Repairing the eardrum alone seldom leads to great improvement of hearing.

You may change your mind about the operation at any time, and signing a consent form does not mean that you have to have the operation.

If you would like to have a second opinion about the treatment, you can ask your specialist. He or she will not mind arranging this for you. You may wish to ask your own GP to arrange a second opinion with another specialist.

How is the operation done?

Most myringoplasties in the UK are done under general anaesthetic, although some surgeons prefer to do it under local anaesthetic. A cut is made behind the ear or above the ear opening. The material used to patch the eardrum is taken from under the skin. Some surgeons use commercially available eardrum grafts. This eardrum "graft" is placed against the eardrum. Dressings are placed in the ear canal. You may have an external dressing and a head bandage for a few hours. For a small perforation, your surgeon may even be able to plug it without making any cut in the ear.

Occasionally, your surgeon may need to widen the ear canal with a drill to get to the perforation.

How successful is the operation?

The operation can successfully close a small hole nine times out of ten. The success rate is not quite so good if the hole is large.

Possible complications

There are some risks that you must be aware of before giving consent to this treatment. These potential complications are rare. You should consult your surgeon about the likelihood of problems in your case.

Taste disturbance:

The taste nerve runs close to the eardrum and may occasionally be damaged. This can cause an abnormal taste on one side of the tongue. This is usually temporary but occasionally it can be permanent.