

ETD - Eustachian Tube Dysfunction.

The Eustachian (“You-station”) tube is a **pressure equalization tube** between your ears and the back of your nose, where the throat starts. (**I call the Eustachian Tube the “Ear, Nose and Throat tube”**). Patients with ETD experience a wide variety of symptoms like a “**plugged sensation**” or a feeling of being “**under water**” or “**in a barrel**”. Sometimes **hearing loss, ringing (tinnitus), dizziness, clicking or popping noises** and even **ear pain** (like when you land in a plane) can result. It can even feel like the pain is in the back of the nose or **tracks down the side of the neck and throat**. Some people can hear themselves chewing and swallowing or even their **own pulse beating inside** – a phenomenon called “autophony” (self-hearing), which is super annoying.

Interestingly, the **ear is almost never the actual problem**. This is because that part of the ear where the tube goes, which we call **the middle ear, is actually part of your sinus and nose system**. These tubes connect your ears and the back of your nose (technically the start of your throat). So anything that screws up your sinuses (like allergies, colds or pressure changes) or your throat (like stomach acid) can result in ETD.

Normally, your tube is closed. It opens naturally when you swallow (which sucks a little air out of your ears. That happens about 1000 x a day.) You can also open the tube if you **plug your nose and blow it up like a balloon to “pop your ears”**. This puts air into the middle ear and allows fluid to come out and your ear drum to move easier. So you hear (and feel) better! This is because the **little ear bones live in the middle part of your ear** and their job is to **amplify sound** going into your inner ear (where the coiled up hearing nerve is). **Whatever happens to your nose, also happens to your ear tubes**. If your nose is stuffy, your tube is stuffy and plugs up so your bones and ear drum cannot amplify normally. If your nose gets sick with a cold or flu, your ear tubes also get sick.

Remember the **middle ear pressure can change many times a day** with every swallow, weather change, altitude change or each time you move your jaw or blow your nose. The **best way to keep your ear tubes working is to make sure your nose is as open and free as possible**. To do this, we may ask you to use a special **nose and sinus rinse solution** with a very mild medicine. Drinking **plenty of fluids**, popping your ears 4 x a day (if you need help, the **Ear Popper** below will do it for you) or using **Advil Cold and Sinus** or an **Antihistamine** (don't use those if you have high blood pressure) can also help. Children can use an **Otovent** (Amazon.ca) which allows them to blow up a balloon (and pop their little ears) with their tiny noses.

Surgery is the absolute last resort. If you have documented hearing loss (on a hearing test) you may require an ear **tube insertion**. We put a tiny silicone tube through your eardrum to temporarily do the job of your natural (Eustachian) tube.

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