

EARDRUM, RUPTURED

(Tympanic Membrane Perforation)



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

A hole or tear in the eardrum. The eardrum is a thin membrane (called the tympanic membrane) that separates the inner ear from the outer ear. The eardrum is involved in hearing.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Sudden pain in the ear.
- Some loss of hearing.
- Bleeding or discharge from the ear (sometimes).
- Ringing in the ear.
- Dizziness.

CAUSES

- An infection of the middle ear. Fluid or pus builds up behind the eardrum and causes it to burst.
- Injury or trauma to the eardrum.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Using a sharp object to clean the ear or relieve an itch. This can be a cotton swab, hairpin, or paperclip.
- Changes in air pressure due to scuba diving or during an airplane flight.
- A loud noise such as a nearby explosion.
- Injury to the head, such as a skull fracture.
- A blow or hit directly to the ear.
- Middle-ear infection (otitis media).

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Don't put any object into the ear canal.
- Get prompt medical treatment for ear infections.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- The eardrum will usually repair itself in 2 months. If it becomes infected, the infection is curable with treatment. Any hearing loss is usually short term.
- Surgery helps if the eardrum does not heal on its own.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Ear infection, with fever, vomiting, and diarrhea.
- Mastoiditis. This is an infection of the mastoid (bony area just behind the ear).
- Permanent hearing loss (rare).



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider can diagnose the problem by an exam of the ear. Fluid from the ear may be sent to the lab for a medical test. A hearing test may be performed.
- Treatment may involve drugs to prevent infection and for pain.
- A patch may be used to repair the hole. In this procedure, a chemical is applied to the area to help the healing and a paper patch placed on the eardrum. This may need to be redone a few times until healing is complete.
- Try to avoid blowing your nose. If you must, blow gently.
- Keep the ear as dry as possible. Don't swim. Take baths instead of showers. If you do shower, wear a plastic shower cap and be sure the ear is covered.
- Surgery called tympanoplasty may be done to repair the hole if it doesn't heal within 2 months. This can be done in a medical office. Your health care provider will give you instructions for home care after surgery.

MEDICATIONS

- Antibiotics to prevent or treat infections may be prescribed.
- Pain relievers. For minor pain, you may use nonprescription drugs such as acetaminophen.

ACTIVITY

Resume your normal activities as soon as symptoms improve.

DIET

No special diet.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of a ruptured eardrum.
- The following occur during treatment:
 - Fever.
 - Pain that persists, despite treatment.
 - Dizziness that continues longer than 12 to 24 hours.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page