What is a Grommet?

A grommet is a tiny, plastic tube that is shaped like a cotton reel. It is placed in the ear drum and allows air into the middle ear, behind the ear drum, and drains any fluid which might be in the middle ear.

Why do I need a grommet?

You have a condition called ‘Otitis Media with effusion’ or glue ear which means the middle ear contains fluid.

This can affect hearing because the bones of the middle ear cannot move freely.

What causes glue ear?

We are not exactly sure what causes glue ear, but doctors believe that it is because the Eustachian tube is not working properly.

The Eustachian tube keeps the air pressure on both sides of the eardrum equal. If the tube is blocked, this causes the air pressure inside the middle ear to drop.

Fluid drains from the lining of the middle ear. With time, this fluid becomes sticky and stops the eardrum and bones of the middle ear vibrating as they should.

Will I be asleep for the operation?

No. There are various types of local anaesthetic which can be used for this operation. The doctors will discuss which one is most appropriate for you at the time of your appointment. You will be awake for the operation.

You may eat and drink normally before the operation.

What does the operation involve?

A tiny hole will be made in your eardrum and the grommet will be gently positioned in the hole. This usually only takes a few minutes.

Most people find the process totally painless but during your operation you will hear popping and sucking, which a few people find uncomfortable.

Ear Nose and Throat Department
01722 336262 ext 2121 or 2209
Consent

We must by law obtain your written consent to any operation beforehand. Staff will explain all the risks, benefits and alternatives before they ask you to sign a consent form. If you are unsure about any aspect of the treatment proposed, please do not hesitate to speak with a senior member of staff again.

How long does the grommet stay in the ear drum?

The grommet usually stays in place for several months and then falls out into the ear canal. Occasionally the grommet has to be removed surgically. In a small group of patients the grommet has to be re-inserted at a later date.

Are there any risks?

Every operation carries some risk of infection and bleeding, but as the hole in the eardrum is tiny, this risk is very much reduced. Around one in every 100 people may be left with a perforated ear drum. If this persists it can be repaired later.

Are there any alternatives?

For persistent glue ear with symptoms, grommets are the treatment of choice. Medical treatments with decongestants or steroids have not been shown to be particularly effective unless there are signs of infection or allergy. Antibiotics can help but only in the short term. Occasionally the doctor will recommend using a hearing aid to improve the hearing loss.

What happens after the operation?

- We do not advise people to drive themselves home after the procedure.
- Because you will now have a tiny hole in your eardrum, you should avoid getting water in your ear.
- When you wash your hair, it is a good idea to make a waterproof seal by putting Vaseline on a ball of cotton wool to plug the entrance to your ear canal.
- You should also use clean water directed away from your ears and for example, not dunk your head back in the bath.
- You should not swim for six weeks after the operation.
- After six weeks you can go swimming again, but it is a good idea to use earplugs and avoid swimming underwater or diving.
- You should not have your ears syringed whilst you have a grommet in your ear.
- You will be given an appointment for a check up with an ENT doctor six weeks after the operation.

Are there any complications I should look for?

It is normal to have a small amount of clear discharge (which may be blood-stained) from the ear.
for 24 hours after the operation. If this carries on after this time or smells, you should contact your GP it may have become infected and you may need to have a course of antibiotic eardrops.

**Further advice**

If there are any aspects of the operation that you do not understand or if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask the doctor in the clinic. Alternatively you can telephone the ENT department on 01722 336262 ext 2121 or 2209.