



Water Precautions with Ear Tubes

Probably the most frequently asked question about ear tubes is whether the patient can safely get water in the ears. For convenience, most ENT physicians either say to avoid water completely or the opposite, that water avoidance is unnecessary. In my experience, most people tolerate average water exposure (bathing, showering, pool water) with no difficulty. Some children and adults even swim under water without any ill effects. At the other end of the spectrum, there are children and adults that are very sensitive to water exposure and they experience either pain with water exposure or water exposure leads to drainage and infection from the ears. (If this happens, it is usually easy to treat with the antibiotic drops you should have on hand.) The bottom line is that everyone is different and you will develop a feel for whether you or your child tolerates water exposure well or poorly.

So what should you do?

Because water avoidance can be a small hassle, and most people do not need to avoid water altogether, I do not recommend ear plugs or water avoidance routinely. However, if you or your child experiences pain or drainage upon water exposure, I recommend water avoidance and/or plugs.

We can make custom plugs for you in our office, or you can pick up the waxy silicone ear plugs at most any pharmacy. They are inexpensive. Contrary to the instructions, you will need to break off a piece that is big enough not to get lost in the ear but small enough to stay in. It helps to knead it to get it warm and a little sticky.

I DO recommend avoidance of lake and river water, which tends to cause infections.