

TIPS FOR FLYING WITH A BLOCKED EAR

Individuals with a Eustachian tube problem may experience difficulty equalising middle ear pressure when flying.

When an aircraft takes off, atmospheric pressure decreases, resulting in a relative increase in the middle ear air pressure. When the aircraft lands, just the opposite occurs: atmospheric pressure increases and there is a relative decrease in the middle ear pressure. Either situation may result in discomfort in the ear due to abnormal middle ear pressure if the Eustachian tube is not functioning properly. Usually pain is worst when landing.

To avoid middle ear problems associated with flying you should not fly if you have an acute upper respiratory problem such as a common cold, allergy or sinus infection.

Should you have such a problem and must fly, or should you have a chronic eustachian tube problem, try the following:

- Obtain from your chemist the following items: Sudafed tablets and Drixine (proxine) nasal spray.
- Following the container directions, begin taking Sudafed tablets the day before your air flight. Continue the medication for 24 hours after the flight if you have experienced any ear difficulty.
- Following the container directions for Drixine, use the nasal spray shortly before boarding the aircraft. Should your ears “plug up” when taking off, hold your nose and swallow. This will help suck excess air pressure out of the middle ear.
- 45 minutes before the aircraft is due to land again use the nasal spray every five minutes for 15 minutes. Chew gum to stimulate swallowing and opening of the eustachian tube.
- Remember that it is unwise to fly if you have an acute upper respiratory infection. Should flying be necessary under these circumstances do not try and forcefully pop your ears.
- If flying is necessary and frequent, your surgeon may recommend a grommet (or middle ear ventilation tube) to minimise ear discomfort and damage.

None of these recommendations or precautions needed to be followed if you have a middle ear ventilation tube (grommet) in place.