

## Q&A: Ear Fluid and Hearing Loss

Find answers to medical questions from experts about fluids in the ear drums and loss of hearing with age.



### Wet in the Ears

**Question:** I can feel fluid in my right ear, and this has been happening for a couple of weeks. I try to clear my eardrum with a cotton bud but that doesn't help. I don't go swimming, neither do I think the condition is due to the showers I take. How could the fluid have entered my ear?

**Answer:** If the ear canal itself is not wet or obstructed by wax or other foreign objects, there is a possibility of actual fluid accumulating deep in the eardrum, in the space known as the middle ear. The middle ear space contains air and is ventilated via the Eustachian tube that opens into the back of the nose, roughly eight to 10 cm from the nostrils.

If the Eustachian tube is obstructed, for example, due to inflammation from a cold, negative pressure may develop in the middle ear. This can cause fluid from the middle ear lining to accumulate in the space that is supposed to contain air. However, this is usually temporary and the fluid will normally clear once the Eustachian tube starts working again. Using a spray to reduce inflammation in the nose may speed up this process.

If the fluid persists for a few weeks, it is important to get it checked to ensure there is no growth or lump in the back of the nose that is physically blocking the Eustachian tube.

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## **Say What?**



**Question:** Lately, I find myself having to ask others to repeat what they say. I just can't make out any conversation at all, especially in a noisy environment, even if the speaker is directly in front of me. I took up a complimentary hearing test offered by a hearing-aid company but it seems there is nothing wrong with my hearing. What can I do to hear better? I'm in my 40s.

**Answer:** Our ability to hear depends on our ears to pick up sound vibrations. Our inner ear then converts the sound energy into electrical signals that are then transmitted to the brain via our hearing nerve. Finally, our brain needs to interpret the sound for us to understand what we hear. Hearing, therefore, involves understanding what we hear (mainly speech) rather than just picking up sounds. Most people have no difficulties comprehending speech in a quiet environment. However, our ability to comprehend speech when there is background noise is far more varied.

A basic hearing test simply tells us that we are able to hear sound of certain loudness and gives little information about our comprehension ability. Hence, more advanced hearing tests are needed. However, these are rarely carried out due to lack of time and sometimes lack of appreciation of their importance when making the diagnosis of hearing impairment. Solutions to not being able to hear may include hearing aids and education about good communication strategies. There are also hearing rehabilitation programmes that can help enhance our ability to comprehend when there is background noise.

**Read these next:**

- [Universal Hearing Screening Programme](#)
- [Functional Screening: Check Eyes, Ears and Mouth](#)

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