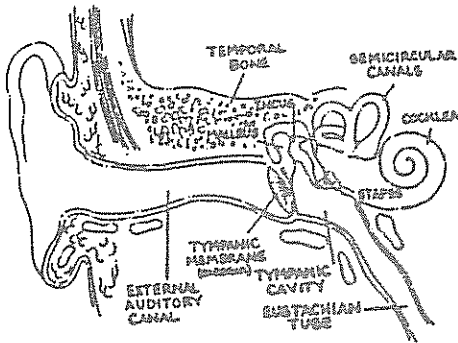


RECURRENT EAR INFECTIONS

Serous Otitis Media

What Is It?

When people have ear infections that come back again and again, they are said to have *Serous otitis media*. The word *serous* refers to the fluid *serum* which builds up in the ear. *Otitis* means ear infection (ot = ear, itis = infection). The other word, *media*, means middle. So, the person has an infection of his or her middle ear.



The middle ear lies behind the ear drum. It is hollow space filled with air. Inside the air

space are tiny bones that conduct sound from the eardrum to the brain. Air pressure in the middle ear is controlled by a tiny tube (eustachian tube) that runs from the middle ear space to the back of the nose.

What are the symptoms of Serous Otitis Media?

Ear stuffiness, congestion, popping and aching may occur. These things result when fluid (serum) fills the middle ear space rather than air. This fluid prevents sound from being passed on, causing reduced hearing.

What Usually Happens?

It usually will clear up by age 6 or 8. However, if it is allowed to run its course without treatment, serious problems can occur.

What Problems May Occur?

Repeated ear infections and hearing loss are the most frequent problems. Hearing loss in a young child is a very serious matter. At this time, most children's learning is through hearing. They may show speech problems or behavior problems. They may have trouble paying attention, and they may become quite "moody". When they enter school they may be labeled a slow learner, when the real problem is that they can't hear as well as other children.

What Is The Cause Of Serous Otitis Media?

It is caused when the tiny air tube in the middle ear doesn't work right. When this tube is blocked, the middle ear cannot maintain the correct air pressure. A vacuum forms and the eardrum is sucked inward. As the rest of the air is absorbed from the middle ear space, a watery fluid (serum) replaces it. There are three things which most often cause the tube to work improperly: allergy, chronic infection, and enlargement of the adenoids.

What Makes It Worse?

Failing to control important allergic factors is one thing which will make it worse. Another is repeated upper respiratory infections such as the common cold, tonsillitis, and throat infections.

What Happens When It Is Treated?

Most patients who have serous otitis media will obtain relief from frequent ear infections when they receive proper treatment. They will also get back their hearing and will prevent complications through proper treatment.