



# Glue Ear- spotting the signs

This factsheet has been produced for parents and carers who have read a basic guide to glue ear such as Deafness Research UK's *Ear infections and glue ear in children* and who want further help to recognise the signs of glue ear.

## WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF GLUE EAR?

Children with glue ear experience differing degrees of hearing loss. There may be no loss of hearing at all, or it may be quite pronounced. The level of hearing may also change or fluctuate from day to day. Parents should watch out for the following signs (but remember that not every child affected will display *all* the signs).

- Children with glue ear may appear inattentive or prone to daydreaming. They may seem to be “hearing only when they want to”.
- They may turn up the TV or say “pardon”, “eh?” or “what?” more than usual. They may mishear words when not looking at the speaker, misunderstand instructions or appear lost when asked to do something.
- A few children may talk too loudly - others talk less than before. They may mispronounce words or speak less clearly than normal.
- They may have trouble with reading, a limited vocabulary and difficulty learning new words.
- Ear infections, which often come before and sometimes follow glue ear, can cause discomfort and pain, making children fretful.
- Some children become quiet and withdrawn or anxious as a result of their difficulty hearing, especially when in a group.
- Having to concentrate hard to hear what people are saying is very tiring, so children affected may be particularly grumpy and tired by the end of the day.
- Not hearing properly can frustrate children and they may become over-active or have temper tantrums, especially when they are tired.

- Children may become unsettled at school or nursery and feel left out of some activities.
- Children may have difficulty following what is being said in noisy environments or large rooms.
- Some children may appear to have a hearing ability that changes from day to day, especially in winter.

## **WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I SUSPECT MY CHILD HAS GLUE EAR?**

If you are a parent and you suspect your child has a hearing difficulty or glue ear, trust your judgement and consult your family doctor. If this is within a few days it is likely that your child's hearing will remain affected. However, note down and report signs of bad or affected hearing in case it improves by the time you get to see the doctor.

## **HOW WILL GLUE EAR AFFECT MY CHILD?**

As well as causing dulled hearing, glue ear can affect a child's balance and speech, their emotional well-being and behaviour.

Older children with glue ear have described experiencing a 'shut-in' feeling, resulting from a combination of the dulled hearing and the physical sensations from the middle ear (e.g. a sense that the ear is blocked up) and sometimes popping sounds. Younger children may have problems with their language development or speech. Particularly when the glue ear lasts a long time, children can develop difficulties communicating or socialising.

## **CAN ADULTS GET GLUE EAR?**

Glue ear is most common in children, but it can occur in adults. As with children, glue ear in adults may follow on from a cold or from an ear infection. It is unusual for adults to have glue ear for more than a few days. Anyone who does should seek specialist medical advice.

## **FURTHER INFORMATION**

Other information on glue ear available from the Deafness Research UK Information Service includes:

Ear infections and glue ear in children: A guide for families – leaflet

Glue ear: A guide for teachers – factsheet

Glue ear: Possible tests – factsheet

Glue ear: Treatments – factsheet

Communication tips for helping a child with glue ear - factsheet

If any of your questions concerning glue ear have not been answered, contact the Deafness Research UK Information Service for further assistance. Our Information team will either answer your enquiry directly or refer it to one of our scientific or medical advisers.

Open: 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m., Monday to Friday (a message can be left at other times).

Freephone: 0808 808 2222

Textphone: 020 7915 1412

E-mail: [info@deafnessresearch.org.uk](mailto:info@deafnessresearch.org.uk)

or click the 'ask question' option from our website homepage:

[www.deafnessresearch.org.uk](http://www.deafnessresearch.org.uk)

Deafness Research UK is the leading research charity for people with hearing and related ear problems.

It runs a wide-ranging research programme, which includes identifying the genes that cause different types of deafness, research into glue ear – the commonest cause of deafness in pre-school children, tinnitus (head noises which affect nearly 5 million people in the UK) and, ultimately, finding a cure for deafness through the regeneration or replacement of cells vital for hearing.

You can support us by making a donation or joining the Deafness Research UK League of Friends. For more information call us on 020 7833 1733 or write to:

Deafness Research UK, 330-332 Gray's Inn Rd, London WC1X 8EE  
Charity no. 326915

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(Reviewed May 2009)