

Glue Ear: Advice for parents

Glue ear (or Otitis Media) is:

- a build-up of fluid in the middle ear, behind the eardrum. This fluid can become thick and sticky, like glue, hence the term "glue ear".
- common in children between the ages 2 to 5. 8 out of 10 children will have glue ear before the age of 10.



Why does Glue ear make it difficult for children to hear?

In the middle ear, behind the eardrum, there's a space that houses three tiny bones. These bones are like little messengers, carrying sound vibrations from the eardrum to the inner ear. When there's fluid buildup in this space, it's like a roadblock for these bones. They can't move properly, which means the sound vibrations can't get through as they should. This can make it hard to hear things clearly and causes a temporary conductive deafness.

What might you notice?

- When a child has glue ear, you might notice some changes in how they respond. They might not seem to hear you when you give them instructions, or they might seem like they're not paying attention or are off in their own world when you try to talk to them. Sometimes, they might answer you in a way that doesn't really make sense. They may find it even more difficult to hear when there's background noise, like the TV or vacuum running.
- They may be avoiding group activities or not want to join in with other kids. It may not be because they don't want to play with others, but because it is harder to hear and understand what's going on around them.
- Speech sound errors- Glue ear can make it tricky for a child to say words correctly. This might mean they have trouble making sounds the right way and their speech might not come out as clear as it should.

Seeking treatment for glue ear is important as untreated Otitis media could lead to long term Speech and Language difficulties.

How can you support children with Glue ear?

- **Reduce background noise** – try to minimise noises in the background. E.g. turn the television off when you are not watching it, avoid having the radio on in the background, close doors to minimise noise from the washing machine etc.
- **Get your child's attention** – before talking to your child, make sure you gain their attention first. To get their attention you could call their name or lightly tap them on the shoulder.
- **Face your child** – make sure to face your child when you are talking. Try to get down to their level so they can see your face. This lets your child see your face and observe clues about what you are saying from the way your lips move, your facial expressions and where you are looking. Make sure the room is well lit.
- **Repeat it back correctly** – If your child says something which is not quite right, repeat the word/phrase back to the child correctly. E.g. if your child said, 'look, a dod' you could say 'yes, it's a dog' or if they said 'he eat apple' you could say 'yes, he is eating the apple'.
- **Break down instructions** – Try to break long instructions into small steps e.g. instead of saying 'now we are going to the park so before we go you need to find your coat' you could simply say 'please get your coat...we are going to the park'.
- **Use visual cues** – where you can, try to use objects around you or gestures to support what you are saying as this can help your child to understand. E.g. if it is dinner time you could use a knife and fork action and/or point to the dinner table while you say this.
- **Take turns when talking** – group conversations may be difficult for your child to follow. To help, encourage everyone to take turns within the conversation and to signal when they want to speak with a gesture/action.

What to do next?

Discuss your concerns with the GP/Audiologist/ENT and talk about the next steps. Some children might be offered grommets if there are several episodes of glue ear. Grommets are tiny, hollow tubes surgically inserted into the eardrum to help drain fluid.

More information:

- "Hear Glue Ear" App
- [Glue ear guide for parents | Documents and resources \(ndcs.org.uk\)](https://www.ndcs.org.uk)
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/articles/z8r3g7h>

