

## Hyperbaric Medicine Service Patient Teaching Instruction for PE Tubes

**Pressure Equalization Tubes ("PE TUBES")** are sometimes necessary for hyperbaric patients. Occasionally a patient has difficulty equalizing or "clearing" their eardrum (tympanic membrane) when receiving hyperbaric treatment due to the pressure changes that occur within the chamber. Sometimes chronic cold or sinus symptoms can cause the problem or simply ones own anatomy prevents the patient from comfortably clearing their eardrums. In these situations, we recommend the patient have PE tubes surgically placed by an Ear, Nose, and Throat (ENT) physician.

**The procedure** is usually done as an outpatient in the physician's clinic or it can be in the hospital. It is a surgical incision into the tympanic membrane to aspirate any collected wax or fluid and insertion of a ventilating plastic tube to keep the pressure equal between the middle and outer ear. The procedure usually takes about 15 minutes.

**After the procedure** you can expect some vague discomfort in the ears. This is usually controlled with Tylenol. You may be given eardrops to place in your ears for 2-3 days after surgery. The drops keep blood from clotting in the hole of the tube and prevent infection around the tube. It is normal to expect some bloody drainage from the ear for a day or two. Cotton balls placed in the ear canals after the procedure will be removed prior to hyperbaric treatment to prevent the cotton balls from being "sucked" into the PE tube during pressurization.

**How long the tubes stay in place** is patient dependent. The tubes can stay in place anywhere from 2-9 months. They occasionally "fall out" sooner, and often stay in place longer. No additional procedure is required to remove the tubes; they will fall out on their own. If it is necessary to have them removed sooner, schedule an appointment with your ENT physician. Once the tubes are out, the surgical hole should heal shut on its own.

**Try not to get water directly in the ears** as long as the tubes are in place. However, when bathing or showering, earplugs are generally *not* necessary. Dirty water should never be allowed to enter the ear canal. Clean or chlorinated swimming water is usually not a problem and it can be allowed to enter the ear canal without any concern in most patients, however, it is suggested after a day of swimming that a few antibiotic drops be placed in the ears at bedtime as a precautionary measure. Soft earplugs or custom ear molds are very effective in keeping water out of the ears if it becomes necessary.

**Contact your ENT immediately** if drainage occurs from ears for more that 3 days, if fever develops greater than 101F, and/or severe pain persists after the use of Tylenol.

**ENT Physician and phone number is:** \_\_\_\_\_

*We hope this information sheet is helpful to answer your questions or concerns.  
If more questions arise, please don't hesitate to ask your Hyperbaric Staff or ENT.*