

Hearing in Cleft Lip & Palate

Many children with cleft palate are at risk of developing hearing loss mainly due to ear infections. In children with cleft lip only, we are not expecting more incidences of ear infections and hearing loss compare to normal children. Cleft palate children are experiencing more ear problems due to the inference of the cleft palate with the Eustachian Tube.

Eustachian Tube connects nasal cavity with the middle ear and it allows the middle ear to ventilate. In children with cleft palate, Eustachian Tube is not functioning properly which affects the middle ear ventilation leading to an accumulation of fluids. Accumulation of fluids lead to ear inflammation or most commonly known as “Otitis Media”. Ear fluids may be uncomfortable but does not cause any symptoms like an ear infection does. Fluids in the middle ear may affect the child’s health in many ways, such as hearing, speech and language, and academic performance.

Ear infection and Hearing:

Regular hearing evaluations are recommended for children with cleft palate, such audiological examination (e.g. Tympanometry) is performed by an audiologist. Many studies reported a high percentage of children with cleft palate being diagnosed with conductive hearing loss. Luckily, conductive hearing losses are treatable. Regular follow-ups with the Otolaryngologist and Audiologist are important due to the risk of ear infections and possible episodes of ear pain.

In many cases, it is necessary to relieve the fluids collected in the middle ear using “ear tubes,” “ventilation tubes”, which are small metal or plastic tubes placed across an incision in the ear drum that allow any fluid collections to drain out of the ear.

It is important to point that the child with cleft lip & palate is at risk of developing speech and language problems due to their structural abnormality. Recurrent ear infections and possible hearing loss might make your child’s speech and language problems more complicated.