

Deafness Research UK is the national medical charity for deaf and hard of hearing people. We support high quality research to bring about rapid improvements in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of all forms of hearing impairment.

We also produce a range of information on hearing-related topics such as tinnitus, glue ear, hearing aids and sudden deafness. To find out more, simply contact us at:

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This leaflet has been produced by Deafness Research UK, in consultation with Mr John Ballantyne, FRCS, CBE; Professor Mark Haggard, HFRCS(Edin), FMedSci, CBE and Professor Tony Wright, LLM, DM, FRCS, TechRMS. No liability can be taken on the part of Deafness Research UK or its advisors for any error or omission. You should not act on any advice without first referring to your family doctor or another medically qualified adviser.

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# In-flight ear health

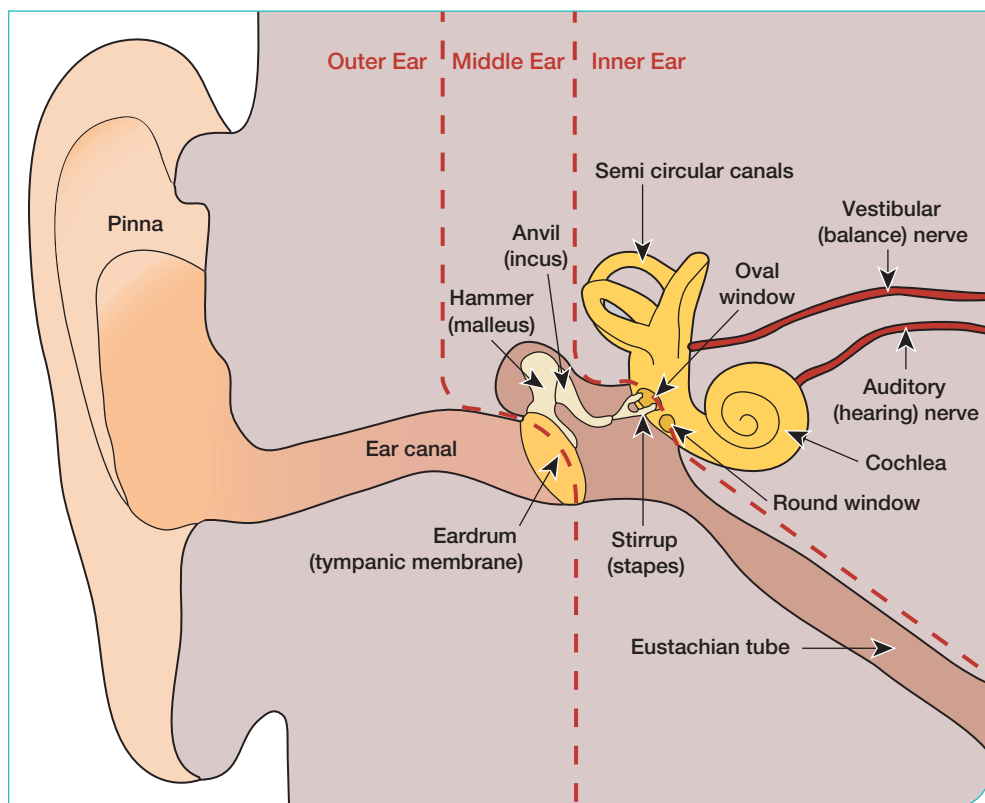
Helping to minimise ear discomfort



This leaflet has been produced to help minimise ear discomfort whilst flying, whether you're a frequent flyer or occasional holidaymaker.

It also includes guidance for hearing aid users and parents of children with glue ear.

## The ear



Generally, the likelihood of discomfort is greater as the plane descends to land. Problems can include a throbbing pain in the middle ear, a dullness of hearing or a feeling of 'fullness' in the ear canal. All are due to air having difficulty moving through the Eustachian tubes (see diagram opposite). They can be worse if you are already suffering from a cold.

You can minimise discomfort by:

- **Swallowing;** when you swallow, air can pass more easily through the Eustachian tubes. This can be helped by chewing gum or sucking boiled sweets, which are sometimes available from the flight crew.
- **Yawning;** this is a very good way of opening the Eustachian tubes, but doing this repeatedly can be difficult. Alternating between yawning and swallowing may be easier.

If you find that this isn't helping much, you could try blowing through your nose with the nostrils pinched closed – this forces air along the Eustachian tube, enabling equal pressure.

- Babies and young children can be particularly affected by ear discomfort during descent. Keeping a drink handy is a good way to get them to swallow.

- If you are congested with a cold, there are over-the-counter nasal sprays available which can help to clear the nose and these can be used about an hour before descent. They should be used sparingly though, as repeated use over many days can actually cause the nose to become more congested. Your pharmacist can advise about specific brands.

- If you use a hearing aid, it should work normally on the aeroplane. However the increased background noise may cause discomfort depending on the type of aid you have. It may be more restful to switch the aid off, though if you do it is advisable to inform the flight crew.
- If your child suffers from glue ear, you should check with their GP to see if there is any reason why they should not fly. If there isn't, most children may find that their hearing improves on ascent. On descent they should follow the guidelines above.
- If your child has a grommet inserted, and as long as it has not become blocked, they should not experience any ear discomfort. This is because the ventilation enables pressure changes to occur.