

Tympanoplasty

Tympanoplasty or reconstruction of the middle ear hearing mechanism serves the purpose of rebuilding the ear drum and/or middle ear bones. It may be as simple as placing a small patch on a hole in the ear drum, or more complicated with the replacement of one of the bones of hearing (called ossiculoplasty). The goals of surgery are typically to improve hearing and also to allow the ear to be exposed to water without it resulting in an infection.

Surgery is successful in 80-90% of cases, and failure to improve is not a complication. Success depends almost as much on the ability of the body to heal and preserve the reconstruction as it does on the surgeon's skill. Fortunately, even those cases that fail may be revised and have the same high degree of expected good result.

There are, nevertheless, some complications that do occasionally occur. Further hearing loss (rarely total) happens less than 10% of the time when the middle ear bones are rebuilt, and for that reason ossiculoplasty is not advised unless hearing is poor. Hearing loss is uncommon if the operation is limited to repairing the tympanic membrane. Injury to the nerve that moves the face (Facial Nerve) as a result of this surgery is also extremely rare. Loss of sense of taste on the side of the tongue may occur. It is usually only a minor inconvenience for a few weeks. Persistent post operative dizziness is almost unheard of after surgical repair of a tympanic membrane perforation and uncommon after rebuilding the ear bones.

Use of a hearing aid may be an alternative to surgery, or may be needed in addition to surgery, if the hearing result isn't ideal after surgery. If the tympanic membrane perforation is not repaired, ear plugs are recommended to protect the middle ear from contamination when bathing.

After surgery, it is important to not blow your nose or get the ear wet by swimming, bathing, or allowing water to enter the canal when showering until Dr. Ashbach tells you that you can do so. Doing these things compromises the success rate of surgery tremendously. Using a cotton ball coated in Vaseline is very helpful in the shower to keep the ear dry.

You may have an incision behind the ear. These sutures will dissolve. Keep the area clean and moist with Vaseline. Most of these scars are nearly invisible within a couple months. A few months after surgery, Dr. Ashbach will likely have you get a hearing test to see how your hearing has improved.