

Air Pressure Injury of the Ear

KEY POINTS

- An air pressure injury happens when your body does not adjust quickly to changes in the air pressure around you. A change in air pressure can cause injury in the ears, lungs, the small air spaces under your skin, and other parts of your body.
 - Treatment may include pain, decongestant, or steroid medicine.
 - Follow your healthcare provider's instructions for care. Ask your provider what symptoms or problems you should watch for and what to do if you have them.
-

What is an air pressure injury?

Your body contains air and fluid. An air pressure injury happens when your body does not adjust quickly to changes in the air pressure around you. A change in air pressure can cause injury in the ears and other parts of your body.

Another name for an air pressure injury of the ear is barotrauma.

What is the cause?

Air pressure changes happen when elevation (altitude) changes such as when you fly in an airplane or drive up into the mountains.

Normally, the inner parts of your ear contain fluid and air that can adjust to keep pressures inside your head normal. Big pressure changes or fast pressure changes between the outside and the inside of your head may cause ear pain or damage to your eardrum if your body does not adjust to a change in the air pressure around you.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of ear injury may include:

- Pain in the ear
- Feeling like your ear is plugged
- Ringing in the ears (tinnitus)
- Blood or clear fluid coming from the ear
- Dizziness
- Short-term hearing loss

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms and medical history and examine you. Your provider will ask what you were doing when your symptoms started. You may need hearing and balance tests.

How is it treated?

You may need medicine such as:

- Nonprescription pain medicine
- Decongestant medicine to help balance the pressure in your ears
- Steroid medicine to decrease swelling
- Antibiotic medicine if you have a bacterial ear infection

Your healthcare provider will advise you to keep your ears clean and dry. Wax or objects blocking the ear canal should be removed by your healthcare provider. Rarely, you may need surgery to repair the inner ear.

How can I take care of myself?

Follow the full course of treatment prescribed by your healthcare provider. In addition:

- Avoid flying if you have a head cold, or take a decongestant medicine before the flight.
- Chew gum or sip liquids to help control pressure in ears while the plane is descending.

Ask your provider:

- How long it will take to recover
- If there are activities you should avoid and when you can return to normal activities
- How to take care of yourself at home
- What symptoms or problems you should watch for and what to do if you have them

Make sure you know when you should come back for a checkup. Keep all appointments for provider visits or tests.

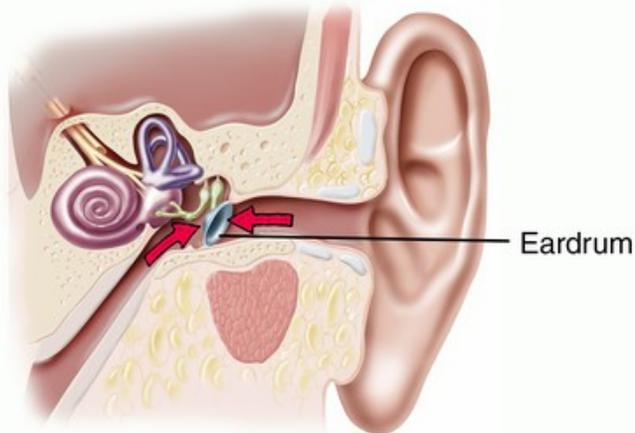
This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.

Developed by Change Healthcare.

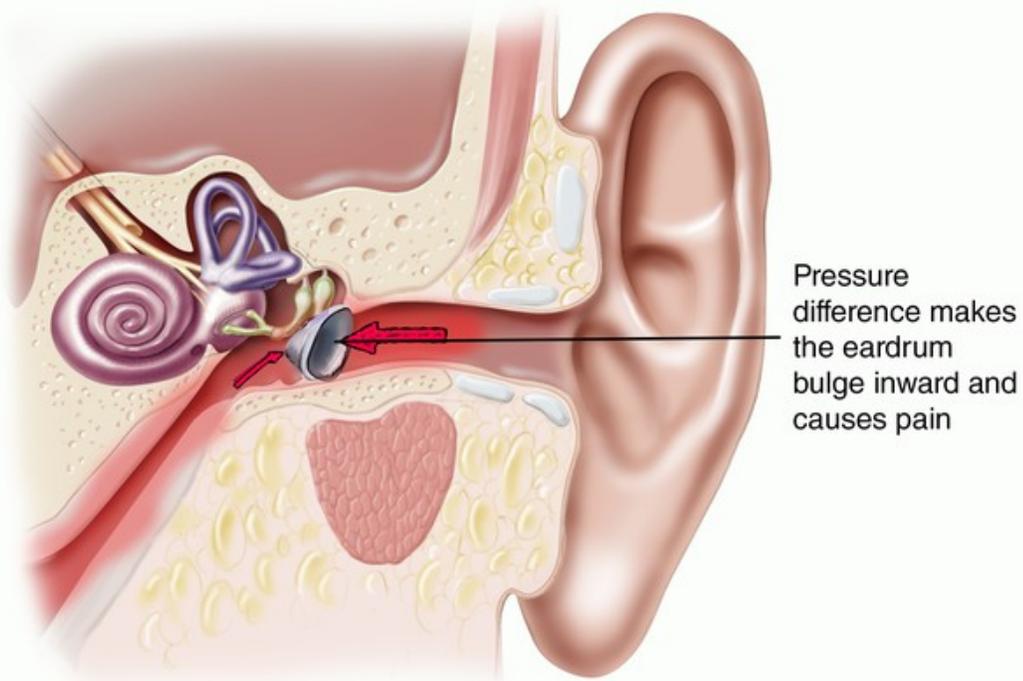
Published by Change Healthcare.

Produced in Cork, Ireland.

Air Pressure Injury of the Ear



Equal air pressure on both sides of the eardrum



Big pressure changes or fast pressure changes between the outside and the inside of your head may cause ear pain or damage to your eardrum if your body does not adjust to a change in the air pressure around you.

©2019 Change Healthcare LLC and/or one of its subsidiaries