Eustachian Tube Dysfunction

The Eustachian tube is the small passageway extending from the back of the nose and upper throat (the pharynx) to behind the eardrum (middle ear). Its main function is to equalize middle ear pressure with that of the atmosphere. Usually, it is closed with its wall collapsed, but opens during swallowing, yawning or chewing, allowing air to pass through.

Symptoms:

Eustachian tube dysfunction occurs when the eustachian tube gets plugged and fails to open, which results in a difference between the atmospheric pressure and the pressure inside your ear. The symptoms of eustachian tube dysfunction include:

- Ears feel plugged or full
- Sounds may be muffled
- You may have ringing in the ears (tinnitus)
- You may have pain in one or both ears
- You may feel a popping sensation
- You may experience some dizziness or trouble keeping your balance
- Your symptoms can’t be relieved by swallowing, yawning, or chewing

Causes:

The most common cause of eustachian tube dysfunction is inflammation of the tube caused by nasal congestion caused by excessive mucus. This can occur with a cold, the flu, a sinus infection, or allergies.

Diagnosis:

Diagnosis of eustachian tube dysfunction is most commonly based on the history of symptoms and visual inspection of the tympanic membrane (or eardrum) for fluid, inflammation and retraction. If your case is severe, you may be referred to a doctor who specializes in ear disorders.

Treatment:

Symptoms of eustachian tube dysfunction will frequently go away on their own. You can try eustachian tube exercises such as swallowing, yawning, or chewing gum to relieve the pressure. You can also try clearing your ears by breathing in then gently breathing out while holding the nostrils closed with your mouth shut.

If your symptoms are persistent or more severe, your health care provider may recommend using a medication such as a decongestant, antihistamine, or nasal steroid to decrease the inflammation and allow the eustachian tube to open.