

Perforated eardrum

A perforated or burst eardrum is a hole in the eardrum. It'll usually heal within a few weeks and might not need any treatment.

But it's a good idea to see your GP if you think your eardrum has burst, as it can cause problems such as [ear infections](#).

Symptoms of a perforated eardrum

Signs of a perforated eardrum, or an ear infection caused by a perforated eardrum, include:

- sudden hearing loss – difficult to hear anything or slightly muffled hearing
- [earache](#) or pain in your ear
- itching in your ear
- clear or bloody fluid leaking from your ear
- [a high temperature](#)
- ringing or buzzing in your ear ([tinnitus](#))

The symptoms will usually pass when your eardrum has healed or any infection has been treated.

When to contact your GP

Talk to your GP if:

- you think you have a perforated eardrum
- your symptoms are not any better after a few weeks
- you get new symptoms such as earache, a fever, itching or fluid leaking from your ear

Your eardrum will usually heal without treatment. But a GP can check for an infection, which may need treatment. They will talk to you about how you can look after your ear.

They'll look into your ear using a small handheld torch with a magnifying lens. This should not hurt.

Things you can do if you have a perforated eardrum

Perforated eardrums do not always need to be treated. They often get better by themselves within a

few weeks.

You can help relieve your symptoms by:

- not putting anything in your ear, such as cotton buds or eardrops (unless your GP recommends them)
- not getting water in your ear – do not go swimming and be extra careful when showering or washing your hair
- not blowing your nose too hard, as this can damage your eardrum as it heals
- holding a warm flannel against your ear to help reduce any pain
- taking painkillers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen to relieve pain if you need to - do not give aspirin to children under 16

Doing these things may reduce the chances of your ear becoming infected.

Treatments for a perforated eardrum

If you have an ear infection caused by a perforated eardrum, your GP may prescribe [antibiotics](#).

If the hole in your eardrum is big, or does not heal in a few weeks, your GP may refer you to an ear specialist. They will talk to you about having surgery to repair the perforated eardrum.

Causes of a perforated eardrum

A hole in the eardrum can be caused by:

- an ear infection
- an injury to the eardrum, such as a blow to your ear or putting an object like a cotton bud deep into your ear
- changes in pressure, such as while flying or scuba diving
- a sudden loud noise, such as an explosion

Preventing a perforated eardrum

Tips to avoid damaging your eardrum:

- contact your GP for treatment if you have symptoms of an ear infection for more than 2 or 3 days
- do not push anything deep into your ears, including your fingers
- do not use cotton buds to clean your ears
- wear suitable ear protection if you're often exposed to loud noises
- when flying, try swallowing, yawning, chewing gum or sucking on a boiled sweet during take-off and landing

Sláintecare.

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