

Surgery improves hearing



Sylvie and Kama Wright play together at a Cedar Rapids park.

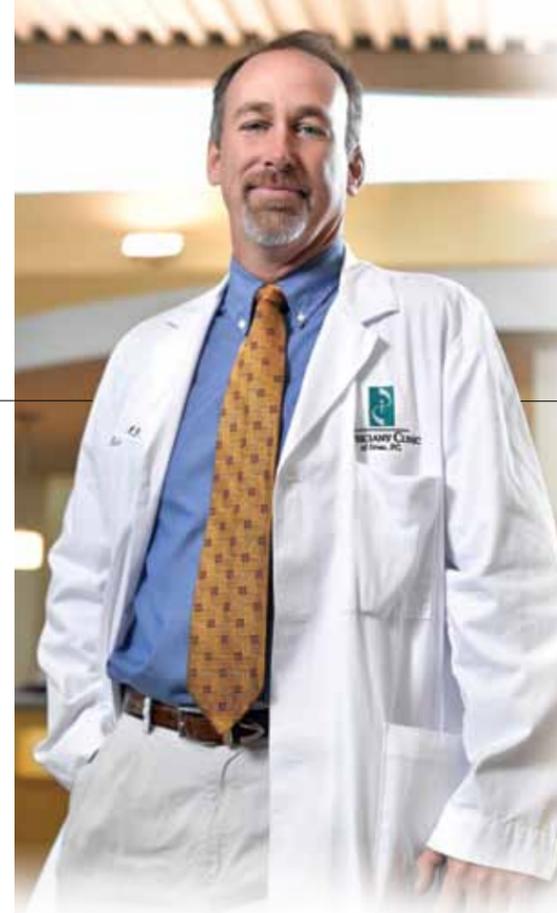
When Tina Wright's two daughters, Kama, 8, and Sylvie, 6, failed their recent hearing tests she knew something needed to be done.

"They've always had some fluid in their ears but they were ahead of the curve on their speech and neither one of them ever had ear infections so until they had the hearing test it wasn't really an issue," said Wright. "So when I learned they were having difficulty hearing I took them to see a specialist after consulting with their pediatrician. I didn't want them to have trouble in school."

"I examined their ears and both girls had a significant amount of fluid in their ears," said Kevin Carpenter, MD, Physicians' Clinic of Iowa, P.C., Department of Ear, Nose and Throat. "We determined they needed ear tubes, which are tiny metal or plastic cylinders surgically inserted into the eardrum to drain fluid and to equalize the pressure between the middle and outer ear."

Why it's done

Ear tubes are typically needed for children like Kama and Sylvie – who have persistent ear fluid in their middle ear. This chronic condition can be associated with temporary hearing loss and speech delays. Other candidates for ear tubes are children with recurrent ear infections that total five to six a year.



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surgery a tiny incision is made into the ear drum. Any fluid is removed and the tube is inserted. The surgery usually takes about ten minutes.

"After surgery the nurses were great," said Wright. "I had to go back and forth between the girls and the nurses helped me comfort them both. Kama and Sylvie were a little sore following their surgery but giving them an over-the-counter pain reliever helped."

"There really aren't any limitations for children after ear tube surgery," said Dr. Carpenter. "They can resume a normal diet once the anesthetic wears off. A follow-up appointment is made to check the ear tubes about a week to ten days after surgery. We also give them ear drops to put in their ears twice a day for several days to help with healing. After the initial follow-up appointment we like to see the children every six months to check their ears and make sure everything still looks good."

Children can resume normal activities once they feel better. Soapy water should be kept out of the ears, but they can go swimming.

Follow-up care

Tubes remain in place for several years. They typically fall out on their own,

but in some cases the doctor may remove the tubes during a routine office visit.

"Once the tubes are removed the drainage holes eventually heal after several months," said Dr. Carpenter. "There is a one percent chance of perforation, which if it occurs can be addressed with a plug."

"Since we had the surgery, both girls have done really well," said Wright. "The television volume is down significantly and I don't notice the girls trying to read my lips when I'm talking to them. They listen to Hannah Montana, ride bikes and were able to hit the pool several times last summer. I'm so glad we had the tubes put in and we don't have to worry about them missing out on what their teachers are saying at school."

"It's common for me to hear a parent tell me how their son or daughter was delayed in speech or walking and after ear tube surgery the child started to walk or talk nearly immediately," said Dr. Carpenter.

■ To find a doctor or learn more about surgery at St. Luke's Hospital log on to stlukescr.org.

"Ear tubes can be really helpful for many children," said Dr. Carpenter. "Typically they experience fewer ear infections, better hearing and improved speech. It's important to note that even with ear tubes some children may get occasional ear infections but generally their overall demeanor is greatly improved."

"We scheduled the surgery at St. Luke's Hospital," said Wright. "It was a really positive experience. The nurses were great with Kama, Sylvie and me. It's a pretty quick procedure and Dr. Carpenter was great about explaining what was going on and really put me at ease."

What to expect

Ear tube surgery is scheduled as an outpatient and no overnight stay in the hospital is needed. During ear tube