



Otoscopy

Systematic examination of the external ear, ear canal and tympanic membrane with an otoscope, with bedside hearing tests.



Patient reference

Date

Time

Completed by

Equipment ready

- ☐ Otoscope with charged battery and working light
- ☐ Disposable specula in several sizes
- ☐ Pneumatic bulb attachment (optional)
- ☐ 512 Hz tuning fork
- ☐ Gloves if there is discharge

Before · Preparation

- ☐ Take a focused history: pain, discharge, hearing, tinnitus, vertigo, trauma, foreign body, previous surgery or grommets
- ☐ Explain the examination and obtain consent
- ☐ Perform hand hygiene; wear gloves if there is discharge
- ☐ Check the otoscope light and attach the largest speculum that fits the canal comfortably
- ☐ Position the patient seated with the head tilted slightly away from you
- ☐ Examine the better-hearing or unaffected ear first

During · External ear

- ☐ Inspect the pinna, the skin in front of and behind the ear, and the mastoid
- ☐ Palpate the tragus and mastoid for tenderness
- ☐ Look for Battle's sign after head injury

During · Otoscope examination

- ☐ Hold the otoscope like a pen, with the handle pointing forwards or downwards
- ☐ Brace the little finger or the side of the hand against the patient's head
- ☐ **Always brace the examining hand against the head so a sudden movement cannot drive the speculum into the canal**
- ☐ Straighten the canal: in adults pull the pinna up and back; in young children pull it down and back
- ☐ Insert the speculum gently into the outer part of the canal only, under direct vision

- ☐ Inspect the canal walls
- ☐ Identify the tympanic membrane and its landmarks
- ☐ Assess the membrane colour, translucency and position
- ☐ Look for perforation, retraction pockets and attic crust or debris
- ☐ Assess membrane mobility with pneumatic otoscopy if available and appropriate
- ☐ **Do not insert instruments, suction or irrigate the ear if a perforation or CSF leak is suspected**
- ☐ Repeat on the other ear

During · Bedside hearing and nerve tests

- ☐ Perform a whispered voice test for each ear, masking the other ear
- ☐ Perform Rinne's test with a 512 Hz tuning fork
- ☐ Perform Weber's test
- ☐ Check facial nerve function in patients with ear disease or trauma

After · Interpretation and action

- ☐ Summarise findings for each ear: external ear, canal, tympanic membrane, hearing tests
- ☐ **Sudden sensorineural hearing loss needs same-day ENT referral**
Per NICE NG98.
- ☐ Mastoid swelling with a pinna pushed forward suggests acute mastoiditis: refer urgently to ENT
- ☐ Haemotympanum or CSF otorrhoea after head injury indicates a possible base-of-skull fracture: manage per EMOD-CP-20
- ☐ Treat otitis media and otitis externa per NICE NG91 and local antimicrobial guidance (EMOD-CP-57)
- ☐ Dispose of the speculum and clean the otoscope
- ☐ Document findings for both ears with a simple diagram if helpful

