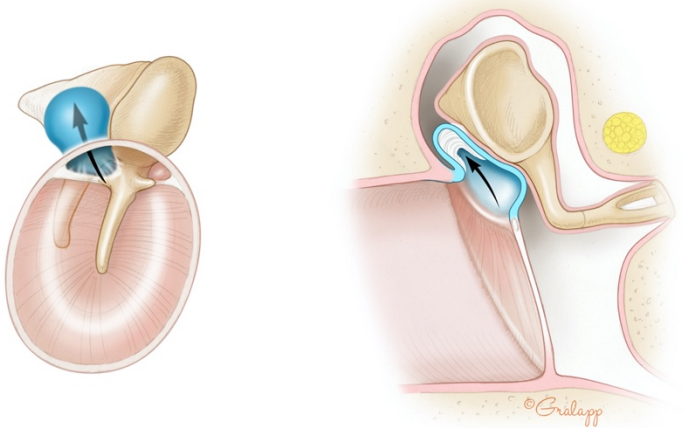


## Cholesteatoma

### Background

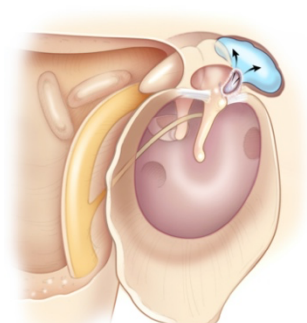
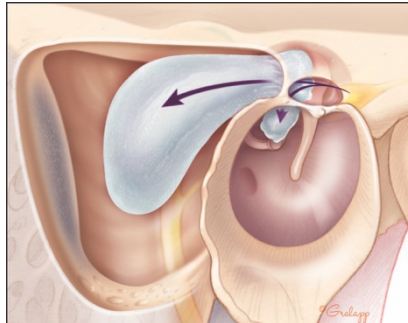
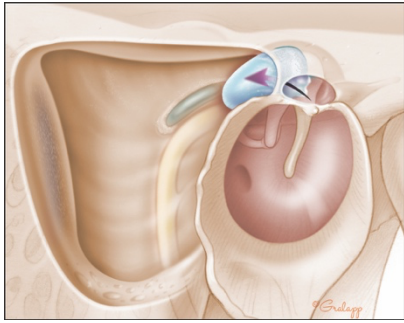
Cholesteatoma is a skin cyst that grows in the ear canal and/or middle ear. How cholesteatomas form is still not fully understood. It is thought to form from native ear canal skin that becomes trapped in a pocket, which can lead to inflammation and infection. The cyst continues to grow as more skin becomes trapped, and the inflammation and infection that ensues can cause destruction of middle ear structures and subsequent ear fullness, hearing loss, tinnitus, imbalance or vertigo. Cholesteatomas can be asymptomatic early on, but if they get infected, they cause foul-smelling ear drainage.

Cholesteatomas occur in 1 in 20,000 people, but it is a common condition we treat at Atlanta Otology. There are no medications that can treat cholesteatoma. The majority of cholesteatomas are best treated with surgical removal. If they are ignored, they can lead to very serious complications such as facial nerve paralysis, brain fluid leak, and brain infection. Cholesteatomas can be diagnosed by your ENT doctor through an otoscopic or microscopic exam. CT and/or MRI scans are often performed to evaluate the extent of disease.



Cholesteatoma forming from a portion of the ear drum. The skin gets retracted or 'sucked in' and develops into a cyst in the middle ear and mastoid.

Jackler Ear Atlas



There can be various patterns of cholesteatoma growths. Some go backwards towards the mastoid bone and others go forward into tight spaces in the middle ear. Jackler Ear Atlas

### Cholesteatoma Surgery

There are various surgical approaches to treating cholesteatomas, and **it all depends on where the cholesteatoma is located and how much damage the cholesteatoma has already done to the ear.** By the time cholesteatomas are recognized and cause symptoms, the cholesteatoma is usually growing in the middle ear and mastoid bone. Cholesteatoma can also get infected and cause a chronic ear infection resulting in ear drainage and pain. Your surgeon may recommend a tympanoplasty surgery to access the cholesteatoma in the middle ear, and a mastoidectomy surgery to address the cholesteatoma and/or infection in the mastoid cavity (bone behind the ear). Sometimes, you may require a surgery called a “canal-wall down” mastoidectomy. This type of surgery is indicated for more extensive cholesteatomas and may require life-long ear cleaning every 6-9 months. Cholesteatoma often sticks to bone and surrounding tissue. **It is not uncommon for patients to require multiple surgeries to clear the cholesteatoma.**

If you have hearing loss as a result of cholesteatoma, there is a chance that your middle ear bones (malleus, incus, stapes) have been damaged by the cholesteatoma. These bones can be reconstructed using certain titanium implants. The timing of middle ear bone reconstruction (called ‘ossiculoplasty’ or ‘ossicular chain reconstruction’) will depend on how extensive your cholesteatoma is found to be at the time of surgery. Sometimes, the ossiculoplasty is delayed and performed 6-9 months from your initial cholesteatoma surgery.