

Ear Infections

What to do when your child gets one

An ear infection is a condition in which the middle ear becomes inflamed.

Children under the age of 6 years are at high risk of developing ear fluid and ear infections. In fact, ear infections are the second most common illness among children, outnumbered only by viral upper-respiratory tract infections, such as colds.

It is normal for children to suffer ear infections more than once. Frequent ear infections usually end around age 5 or 6.

Ear infections are usually accompanied by fever and an ear-ache. The aching is caused by fluid putting pressure behind the eardrum.

Middle ear infections occur in the part of the ear behind the eardrum. Some experts believe young children get a lot of ear infections because their immune systems have not yet matured. Others believe that the eustachian tube, which keeps the middle ear filled with air and free of fluid, is narrower and less effective in young children.

In most cases, ear infections are not difficult to cure.

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Why children get ear infections and what to do when your child gets one.

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You & Your Child



What to do when your child gets an ear infection

Several things put children at risk of developing ear infections

Among young children, an ear infection is a common complication of a cold.

Other factors that put children at risk of developing ear infection include:

- Bottle feeding. Breast milk provides more antibodies that fight infection.
- Second-hand tobacco smoke. Children are three times more likely to develop middle ear infections when they are exposed to second-hand smoke.
- Group childcare. Exposure to colds and other viruses increases the chances of an ear infection.
- Allergies. Watery mucus can clog the eustachian tube.

What are the symptoms?

Fever and complaints about ear pain are the two common symptoms of a middle ear infection.

However, ear pain alone does not always mean the middle ear is infected. Other things can cause an earache, such as changes in temperature – going from the cold into a warm house, for example.

If your child complains of ear pain after several hours, call your doctor.

Temporary hearing loss is common

When the middle ear fills with fluid, children will often have difficulty hearing – even after the earache is gone.

Hearing loss due to an ear infection is usually temporary. The body tends to absorb the fluid within 3 months or so. During that time, hearing should gradually improve.

Your child should see a doctor if an earache persists

The only way to know for sure if he or she has an ear infection is to look at the eardrum. Once the doctor knows the ear is infected, treatment can be prescribed.

Although most ear infections do not lead to serious complications, if left untreated they could result in scarring and hearing loss.

The most common treatment for middle ear infection in the United States is the use of antibiotics.

The most commonly prescribed antibiotic for middle ear infections is amoxicillin, which is the generic name of a synthetic penicillin. If your child is allergic to penicillin, he or she should be prescribed a drug from another antibiotic family. Some experts, however, believe antibiotics are used far too often.

With antibiotics, give each dose according to schedule

Antibiotics are usually prescribed to be taken over a seven to ten day period. Your child should take all of the doses according to schedule – even after the earache goes away.

Your doctor may prescribe an aspirin substitute

Your doctor may suggest an **aspirin substitute** for your child rather than regular aspirin to help reduce your child's fever and ease the ear pain. Brand name aspirin substitutes include children's formula Tylenol and children's formula Motrin.

Warmth near a painful ear may help comfort your child

Some experts say that warmth can help your child's ear feel better. Try either a warm, wet compress, or a warm heating pad against your child's ear.

Hugs, kisses, and kind understanding always help to comfort a child.

