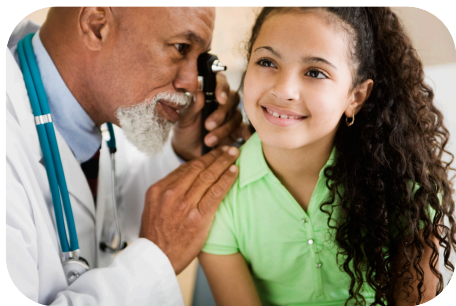


What is an ear infection?

An ear infection usually refers to an infection in the middle ear, an air filled space between the ear canal and the inner ear hearing and balance mechanism. The middle ear drains to the back of the nose through a canal called the Eustachian tube. Colds and allergies can cause a temporary blockage of the Eustachian tube which can result in fluid or infection developing in the middle ear. Ear infections are one of the most common infections in young children because the Eustachian tube is not well developed and allows germs from the nose and mouth to enter the middle ear space.

Symptoms of an ear infection

Ear infections are almost always associated with ear pain, crankiness and sometimes fever or cold symptoms. Occasionally, poor hearing and drainage of clear, blood tinged, or infected fluid from the ear occur. Although ear pain is the most common symptom of an ear infection, earaches can also be caused by nasal congestion, the accumulation of uninfected fluid in the middle ear, referred pain from a sore throat, a swollen gland in the neck, or TMJ inflammation. Swimmer's ear, inflammation of the skin lining the ear canal, often causes severe ear pain and is usually caused by excess water irritating the skin lining the outer ear canal.



Treating ear infections

Ear infections in children over two years old who have a temperature less than 102° will often get better without antibiotic treatment. In these children over the counter pain medicine is used to help them feel better. Children under two years old, or those with a temperature over 102, or ear infection symptoms for more than two days are treated with antibiotics which are provided in liquid, chewable or tablet form for ten days. Over the counter symptom relief medicine can also be given for the first day or two, until the

antibiotic begins to help. Swimmer's ear is usually treated with ear drops and sometimes a hair dryer on a cool setting is used to help keep the outer ear dry.



After the symptoms of infection resolve, the fluid in the middle ear space drains when the Eustachian Tube begins to function normally. We recommend re-examining children who have had an ear infection about two weeks after starting treatment. Often the infected ear is completely healed at that time. However, clear, uninfected fluid can remain in the middle ear space for weeks to months. We will check the ear on a monthly basis, until the fluid resolves completely. Fluid can cause a temporary hearing problem. Children who have fluid persisting for several months or who have many ear infections will be referred to an ENT specialist and may need surgery to place a temporary plastic drainage tube in the eardrum or adenoidectomy.

Preventing ear infections

Ear infections are common, can heal without antibiotic treatment, and are usually not associated with serious complications. You can reduce the risk and frequency of ear infections by breastfeeding, avoiding exposure to smoke, eliminating pacifiers in children over one and by keeping up to date with all recommended childhood vaccines and the flu vaccine.



For more health and wellness information for your family please visit our website:

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