

# Ear Infection in Children

Young children are known to get ear infections more often than adults, and there are many reasons for this. Ear infections are most common in children under the age of three. It happens because children's immune systems are not yet ready to fight many infections, as well as the fact that there is an anatomical difference between children and adults, which means that drainage from a child's middle ear is not as good as it is in adults.

The child is at a higher risk after the first year of life, when a child is no longer being breastfed (breast milk helps children fight infection by supplying immunity support), and the child is exposed to various germs more often.

Most of the infections occur in the middle ear. It is the part of the ear that is behind the eardrum and is not visible from outside. But the middle ear is connected to the upper respiratory tract by way of the Eustachian tube, to maintain middle ear drainage and pressure. But sometimes respiratory infections may be able to move up the Eustachian tube, thus causing a disease of the ear called otitis media.

## How to know if a child has a middle ear infection

A lot depends on the age of the child, as a grown-up child would most likely be able to inform somebody about the pain in their ear. For younger children, there may be drainage from the ear that is a visible symptom. It is not common for a child to have vaguer symptoms like fever, diarrhea, vomiting, loss of appetite, balance problems, trouble sleeping, and hearing issues. Younger children may cry more often and for no apparent reason. One should always consider that there is an ear infection if a child has had an upper respiratory disease in recent history.

## Prevention of ear infection

- Vaccinate your child against the flu and pneumococcal infection. Studies have demonstrated that vaccinated children have far fewer episodes of ear infection as compared to non-vaccinated children
- Wash hands frequently, and teach your child the basics of hygiene
- Avoid smoking near a child, as studies have shown that children of parents who smoke are at higher risk of ear infection
- Do not allow sick children to spend time together
- Do not let water or shampoo get into their ears while having a bath
- Instruct your child to use earplugs while swimming, especially if ear infections are common for your child

## Diagnosis and treatment

Fortunately, most ear infections do not need much treatment and will subside by themselves. A GP or specialist can diagnose the disease of the middle ear by looking at it through an otoscope. Most cases do not need an antibiotic, except perhaps the prescription of a painkiller or anti-inflammatory drug, but in some severe cases, a doctor may prescribe antibiotics, too.

Ear drops are only required when there is an infection of the outer ear. It is also important to understand that the majority of cases do not require an antibiotic. Some fluid may remain in the mid ear weeks after the infection, and in most cases will clear out slowly. In the majority of cases of ear infection, no damage is done to the child's ear, and a child will outgrow them to have absolutely normal hearing.

*About the author:*

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Dr. Preet is a family physician. He has been practicing medicine for the last 15 years and often sees children with various illnesses in his day-to-day practice. He understands the importance of identifying serious symptoms on time and keeping the environment safe for toddlers and young children. He is also a passionate writer.

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