



PEDIATRIC HEALTHCARE UNLIMITED

Ear Infection (Otitis Media)

DEFINITION

An ear infection is a bacterial infection of the middle ear (the space behind the eardrum). It usually is a complication of a cold, occurring after the cold blocks off the eustachian tube (the passage connecting the middle ear to the back of the throat). The pain is due to pressure and bulging of the eardrum from trapped, infected fluid.

Most children (75%) will have one or more ear infections, and over 25% of these will have repeated ear infections. In 5% to 10% of children, the pressure in the middle ear causes the eardrum to rupture and drain. This small tear usually heals over the next week. The peak age range for ear infections is 6 months to 2 years, but they continue to be a common childhood illness until 8 years of age.

HOME TREATMENT

Antibiotics. An ear infection is treated with antibiotic. Try to remember all doses. Give the medicine until all the pills are gone or the bottle is empty. (An antibiotic should not be saved from one illness to the next because it loses its strength.) Even though your child will feel better in a few days, give the antibiotic until it is completely gone to keep the ear infection from flaring up again.

Pain Relief. Acetaminophen or Ibuprofen can be given for a few days for the earache or for fever over 102° F (39°). Earaches tend to hurt more at bedtime.

Restrictions. Your child can go outside and does not need to cover the ears. Swimming is permitted as long as there is no perforation (tear) in the eardrum or drainage from the ear. Air travel or a trip to the mountains is safe; just have your child swallow fluids, suck on a pacifier, or chew gum during descent. Your child can return to school or day care when he or she is feeling better and the fever is gone. Ear infections are not contagious.

CALL OUR OFFICE

IMMEDIATELY if

- The fever or pain is not gone after your child has taken the antibiotic for 48 hours.
- Your child develops a stiff neck.
- You feel your child is getting worse.