



We Improve Communication for Life

CHILDHOOD EAR INFECTIONS

WHAT IS AN EAR INFECTION?

- Children's ear infections are often called otitis media.
- Children's ear infections are usually in the space behind the eardrum (middle ear).
- Fluid with or without infection can collect in the middle ear and may cause hearing difficulty.
- Signs of an ear infection include: fever, fussiness, tugging on the ears, puss or blood coming from the ears.
- Some children may not show any signs at all.

WHO GETS EAR INFECTIONS?

- Nearly every child has had at least one ear infection. By age three the average child has had four to six ear infections.
- Some children get more than the average amount of ear infections due to frequent illness or birth defects.
- Ear infections are more common in the winter or early spring.

WHY DO CHILDREN GET EAR INFECTIONS?

- The eustachian tube that connects the middle ear to the back of the throat does not open properly. Fluid builds up and cannot drain. Bacteria or viruses can move into this fluid.
- It may be hard to determine the reason for your child's ear infection.

Possible causes include:

- Family history of ear infections
- Babies laying flat on the back while drinking a bottle
- Contact with sick children
- Birth defects such as cleft palate
- Physical development of the ear, nose and throat
- Smoking in the home
- Allergies/Asthma
- Ethnic origin
- Seasons

Adapted from Alberta College of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists, Childhood Ear Infections, May 2003

WHY SHOULD YOU BE CONCERNED ABOUT EAR INFECTIONS?

HEARING LOSS

- Ear infections usually cause temporary hearing difficulties.
- Ignoring ear infections may result in serious medical/hearing problems.
- Children with ear infections hear muffled, unclear sounds. If you plug your ears with your fingers, you will have an idea what speech sounds like to your child.

LANGUAGE & RELATED PROBLEMS

- It is important to clear up an infection as soon as possible to prevent hearing difficulty from interfering with normal speech and language development.
- Learning difficulties
- Attention and behavior difficulties
- Poor development of listening skills

WHAT CAN THE DOCTOR DO ABOUT MY CHILD'S EAR INFECTIONS?

- The doctor will ask you questions to find out about your child's medical history. The doctor may ask:
 - How many ear infections has your child had?
 - How have the ear infections been treated in the past?
 - Do you think your child has trouble hearing?
 - Do you think your child's speech and language is normal or delayed?
- The doctor will examine your child with a special light called an otoscope to look for fluid or infection behind the eardrum.
- The doctor may or may not prescribe medication to clear an infection. If the infection and hearing difficulty continue, the doctor may refer your child to specialists. Your child may see:
 - An audiologist who will test your child's hearing and make recommendations.
 - An otolaryngologist or ENT - a doctor who specializes in treating medical problems of the ear, nose, and throat.
 - A speech-language pathologist, who will evaluate your child's speech and language.
- Other treatments for ear infections include long-term use of antibiotics, insertion of ventilation tubes through your child's eardrums, or further medical intervention. It is important to remember that such medical treatments do not cure ear infections; they control them temporarily, giving time for the eustachian tube to mature and to minimize hearing loss.
- Alternative or holistic forms of treatment may also be considered.

HOW CAN I HELP?

WATCH YOUR CHILD'S BEHAVIOR

- Watch your child for signs of fever or discomfort, such as pulling on the ears.

WATCH FOR SIGNS OF HEARING DIFFICULTY

- Does your child startle or try to look for noises?
- Does your child ask “what” or “huh” frequently?
- Does your child move closer to or turn up the volume of the television?

UNDERSTAND YOUR CHILD'S TREATMENT

- Ask the doctor to explain anything you don't understand about your child's treatment.
- If the doctor prescribes medication, make sure you know how to give it to your child and be sure to give your child all of the medication.
- Ask the doctor what you can do to relieve your child's ear pain.
- Ask the doctor when you should bring your child back for an ear check.

UNDERSTAND EAR INFECTIONS

- Most children get ear infections and few infections are dangerous.
- Your child may outgrow ear infections.
- There is little you can do to prevent ear infections.

TALK TO YOUR CHILD

- Children usually imitate what they hear. Talk about everything your child does during the day and expand your child's language (ie. if your child says 'dog' you say 'brown dog' or 'that's a nice brown dog').
- Repeat your child's words using adult pronunciation.
- Read stories to stimulate your child's speech and language development.
- If your child has difficulty hearing, move close and speak clearly
- Build vocabulary. Use new words while shopping, bathing, eating, taking a walk, etc.

For more information, call 614.263.5151 to speak with a licensed and certified Audiologist at the Columbus Speech & Hearing Center