

Ear Infection (Otitis Media)

What is it?

Inflammation of the middle ear, called otitis media or an “ear infection,” is often related to a pre-occurring sore throat, cold, or respiratory infection. The inflammation causes the eustachian tube (which connects the inner ear to the throat) to malfunction, leading to the painful, irritating build-up of fluid, which can encourage the growth of virus and bacteria and cause acute otitis media. Though ear infections are most common among children (nearly 80% of all children will have at least one before the age of 3), adults can suffer from them, too.

Symptoms

Symptoms of an ear infection are similar for adults and children, and vary from patient to patient. They may include a combination of the following:

- ✓ Ear pain
- ✓ Increased ear drainage
- ✓ Hearing loss
- ✓ Loss of balance
- ✓ Fever
- ✓ Congestion

In infants and small children, who cannot verbalize their pain, some symptoms may manifest as irritability, fatigue, tugging at their ears, difficulty sleeping, and/or a decrease in appetite.

Diagnosis

Because the symptoms of an ear infection often mimic other serious ailments, and because small children may have difficulty in explaining their symptoms, it is important to consult your physician for a diagnosis. In addition to listening carefully to your symptoms, or your child’s symptoms, your physician will likely perform tests to make a diagnosis. These tests may include a combination of the following:

- ✓ Physician examination with an otoscope, allowing the physician to see the outer and inner ear.
- ✓ Physician examination with a pneumatic otoscope, sending a gentle puff of air into the ear to gauge ear drum movement.
- ✓ Tympanometry, to test the condition and function of the inner ear.
- ✓ Hearing test (often recommended for children or adults who have frequent ear infections).



Did you know? Babies who are breast-fed, and who live in smoke-free environments, are far less likely to suffer from ear infections.

Treatments

Because the frequency and severity of otitis media varies from patient to patient, treatment plans will also vary. Most treatment plans will include a combination of the following:

- ✓ Antibiotics in the form of ear drops and/or oral medication
- ✓ Analgesics for pain management (DO NOT give aspirin to a child with a fever, as this may cause Reyes syndrome)
- ✓ Smoking cessation (for adults) or avoidance of second-hand smoke (for children)
- ✓ Myringotomy (if the pediatric patient suffers from otitis media for three months)
- ✓ Surgical removal of the adenoids

For any medicine therapy to be effective, all medication must be taken as per the physician’s instructions. If these instructions are unclear, please consult your physician.

It is also important to complete the recommended medicine therapy, even if symptoms recede and you are feeling better.

Brought to you by the caring physicians at:

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