

A Big Pain in a Tiny Place: Coping With Ear Infections

Earaches are tough on everyone: the kids who have them, and the parents who care for the kids who have them. When an earache is caused by otitis media – better known as a middle ear infection – it's not only painful, it can be serious. Protect your child's ears by:

- Watching him or her for symptoms. Ear infections often occur when your child has a cold, although that's not always the case. Even children who can't talk can give you signals. Look for:
 - Pulling or scratching at the ears
 - Hearing problems
 - Crying and irritability
 - Fever
 - Ear drainage
- Seeing your healthcare provider as soon as you suspect an ear infection. Untreated ear infections can lead to hearing loss; they can also spread infection to nearby structures in the head.
- Making sure your child takes all his prescribed medication, exactly as directed. Do not stop giving your child the antibiotics, even if he seems to be feeling better. His infection may become resistant to the antibiotic, and require stronger antibiotics.
- Keeping the infected ear free of water until it's healed.
- Treating his pain with acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) or ibuprofen (such as Motrin or Advil). A warm compress on the affected ear(s) may also help.
- Taking your child back for a follow-up doctor's visit as instructed. It's important that your healthcare provider check your child's ear to make sure the infection has cleared up.

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