

# Ear Infections in Children

Ear infections are common in children.

Most children will have at least one infection when they're young ...  
but they usually outgrow them around the time they start grade school.

Here's an up-close look at what causes them ...

and how to care for your child at home.

An ear infection is an infection behind the eardrum.

It can be caused by a virus or bacteria.

The infection usually starts with a cold, which can cause swelling in the small tubes between the ears and the throat ...

called Eustachian tubes.

This swelling can block the tubes, so fluid gets trapped inside the ear ...  
making a perfect place for bacteria or viruses to grow and cause an infection.

Young children get ear infections the most, because their eustachian tubes are smaller and get blocked more easily.

An ear infection can be painful and can cause a fever.

Small children may pull at their ears, fuss and cry, and have trouble sleeping.

Older children will often say their ear hurts.

Treatment may depend on your child's age and symptoms.

Your care provider may suggest waiting 2 or 3 days to see if the ear infection gets better on its own ...  
especially for children older than 2 years who don't have a very bad infection.

If your child doesn't get better with just rest and home care, your doctor may prescribe antibiotics.

At home ... over-the-counter pain medicine can help your child feel better.

For a fever, pain, or fussiness ...

ask your doctor if your child can take acetaminophen, such as Tylenol ...

or ibuprofen, such as Advil or Motrin.

Follow all of the instructions on the label.

And don't give aspirin to anyone younger than 20 ...

because it's been linked to Reye syndrome, a serious illness.

To comfort your child, try putting a warm cloth on the ear for pain.

And make sure your child gets plenty of rest ...

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which helps fight the infection.

If the doctor prescribed antibiotics for your child, give them as directed.

Children usually start to feel better after a couple of days, but keep giving the antibiotics until your child has used up the recommended amount.

Watch for signs of any problems.

Call your doctor if your child has ...

a new or higher fever ...

redness or swelling around or behind the ear ...

or ear pain that's getting worse.

Get medical help right away if your child ...

is confused ... or doesn't know where he or she is ...

or is extremely sleepy or hard to wake up.

Also, be sure to talk to your doctor if your child ...

doesn't get better within 2 to 3 days ...

has new or worse discharge ...

such as fluid that looks like pus or blood ...

or has any new symptoms after the ear infection has gone away ...

such as a hearing problem.

Remember ... it's okay to call your doctor if you have any questions or concerns.

Knowing more about your child's ear infection ...

and what to watch for ...

will help you give your child the best care at home.