

Stewardship of the Body



“I give you thanks that I am fearfully, wonderfully made” (Ps. 139)

Ear Infections

How common are ear infections? According to the National Institutes of Health, 3 out of 4 children will have had at least one ear infection by the time they are 3 years old.

What are ear infections? Ear infections (or Otitis Media) are an inflammation of the middle ear, right behind the ear drum.

What causes ear infections? Ear infections are usually caused by bacteria. They often occur after a cold or other upper airway infection, which can allow bacteria to grow in the middle ear.

What are the signs & symptoms of ear infection? Symptoms may include pain caused by fluid build up in the middle ear behind the eardrum, as well as fever and temporary hearing loss. If the child is too young to tell you, watch for the following: pulling or tugging on the ear, fussiness, crying, problems sleeping, fever, fluid drainage from the ear, balance problems, hearing loss.

Why do children get more ear infections? Children are more at risk for ear infections partly because the eustachian tube, which goes from the nasal area to the middle ear, is less well developed and not as slanted in children as adults. This makes it harder for fluid to drain out of the middle ear and normal air to get in. It also provides a pathway for bacteria or viruses to get to the middle ear.

How are ear infections treated? If the eardrum is red & swollen and the doctor thinks the inflammation is due to bacteria, an antibiotic may be prescribed. Some ear infections may be treated with ear drops. If there is pain but no visible signs of inflammation, the problem may not be an infection, so antibiotics wouldn't be useful. The advice may be to wait a day to see if the pain goes away on its own. Antibiotics only should be used for a true infection. If they are over-used or used when not necessary there is a danger of bacteria becoming resistant to them.

What if the ear infections keep coming back? The doctor may recommend placing small tubes in the eardrum to help eliminate fluid and allow air in to create a healthy environment in the middle ear.

Can ear infections be prevented? There are several things that can be done to prevent ear infections in children. They include:

- Keep them away from second-hand smoke
- Do not allow them to take a bottle to bed
- Wash hands often to prevent the spread of bacteria
- Make sure they get their flu shot every year

Another preventive method involves a new vaccine called PCV13 that protects against some of the most common bacteria that cause ear infections. It is recommended for all children under 5. Scientists are working to develop and test additional vaccines.

Source: <http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/issue/Sep2010/Feature2>