



## COMPASSION SERVICES

### Ear Infections

A typical middle ear infection (otitis media) in a child begins with a viral infection (such as a common cold). Sometimes the middle ear becomes inflamed and causes fluid buildup behind the eardrum. In other cases, the Eustachian tubes — the narrow passageways connecting the middle ear to the back of the nose — become swollen.

Children are more prone to both problems for several reasons. The passages in their ears are narrower, shorter, and more horizontal than the adult versions. Because it's easier for germs to reach the middle ear, it's also easier for fluid to get trapped there. And just as children are still developing, so are their immune systems. Once the infection takes hold, it's harder for a child's body to fight it than it is for a healthy adult.

#### **What are the signs and symptoms?**

- More crying than usual, especially when lying down
- Trouble sleeping and/or hearing
- Fever
- Tugging at the ears
- Fluid coming out of the ears

#### **What is the treatment?**

You want to make sure your child is comfortable by controlling their pain. If their older than six months, you can manage their pain with over-the-counter pain relievers such as acetaminophen and ibuprofen. Based on your child's age, history of previous infections, degree of illness, and underlying medical problems treatment may be different. One strategy is to prescribe antibiotics and the second is watchful waiting. Watchful waiting refers to the idea of observing a child for 48 to 72 hours before starting antibiotics. If the child isn't feeling better, then antibiotics may be necessary.

#### **What Can you do to Prevent Ear Infections?**

- **Avoid Secondhand Smoke Exposure**

- o Smoking is a huge contributor to childhood illness. Ear infections are no exception to that rule. Smoking is addictive and hard to quit, but not every smoker realizes the harmful effects that secondhand smoke could have on his or her child. Quitting is just as important for your child's health as your own.



- **Proper Hygiene**

- o Bad hygiene habits are another major problem. Children in childcare are more exposed to widespread bacteria, as are those who drink from a bottle as opposed to a sippy cup. That's because bottles have more surface area for germs to live on. Teach children to wash their hands frequently to prevent the spread of germs that spread illness.

- **Keep Your Child Up To Date with Vaccines**

- o Talk with your child's provider about the vaccines that protect against pneumonia and meningitis. Studies show that vaccinated children experience fewer ear infections.

- **Breastfeed Your Baby**

- o Breastfeed infants for the first year. Breast milk has many substances that protect your baby from a variety of diseases and infections. Because of these protective substances, breastfed children are less likely to have bacterial or viral infections, such as ear infections.

- **Get A Flu Shot**

- o Consider getting immunized against influenza. Aside from protecting against this yearly disease, it can help prevent ear infections.

**Source:** <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/ear-nose-throat/Pages/Ear-Infection-Information.aspx>