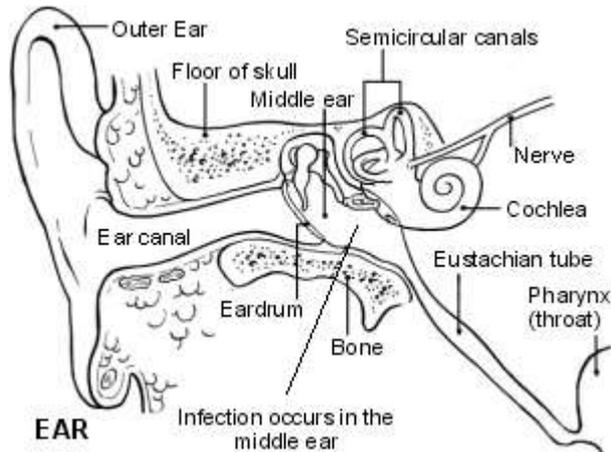


# Otitis Media

Otitis Media is an infection of the middle ear – the space between the ear drum and the inner ear; it is very common in children but can also occur in adults. Painkillers are the main treatment. Antibiotics are not usually needed, the infection normally settles in a few days.

## Anatomy of the Ear



## Symptoms

- Earache is a common symptom; this is due to the pressure from mucus pressing up against the ear drum.
- Reduced hearing which may be present for a few days or even weeks.
- Fever.
- Flu like symptoms are common in young children. They may also vomit and be lethargic.
- Occasionally the ear drum perforates (bursts) this allows the mucus to leak into the ear canal which relieves the pressure in the middle ear and therefore reducing the pain. The perforation usually heals within a few weeks when the infection has settled.

## Causes

Otitis media is usually caused by the common cold. The middle ear is normally filled with air but when the patient has congestion the space becomes filled with fluid this then can become infected by viruses or bacteria. The fluid will often drain away down the Eustachian tube in to the throat but occasionally it may block this tube causing pain. Enlarged tonsils or adenoids may block the Eustachian tube slowing down the drainage of this fluid.

Not all ear pain is caused by an infection in the middle ear; the pain can be caused by tooth problems.

## Treatment

Most bouts of ear infections will settle within a few days without treatment, your own immune system can usually clear the bacteria or viruses causing the problem.

## Pain Killers

Regular paracetamol (4 times a day) or ibuprofen (3 – 4 times daily depending on the age of the child) both of these are easily available to buy from the pharmacy or supermarkets.

## Antibiotics

These are not advised in most cases as mentioned previously, the infection usually settles in a few days.

They **may** be prescribed if the child is under 2 years of age.

# Otitis Media

## Possible complications

It is common for the mucus to take longer to drain than a few days. This may cause a reduction in the hearing. This usually settles in a couple of weeks and the hearing returns to normal. Occasionally this may develop into "Glue Ear" which causes a longer period of hearing problems. Your GP will advise you about this.

Rarely the infection may spread to the deeper tissues, if the symptoms do not improve over 3-4 days see your GP.

It is common for children to have 2 or 3 bouts of ear infections during childhood, in most cases little can be done to prevent these.

There is some evidence to say these infections are less likely to develop in

- Babies who are breast fed
- In children who live in smoke free homes, Passive smoking of babies and children can increase the risk of developing ear infections.

## References

[www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk)

[www.cks.library.nhs.uk](http://www.cks.library.nhs.uk)

Preparation Date: May 2009