

What You Need to Know About **Ear Infections**

What are Ear Infections?

Your doctor might also call an ear infection **otitis media**. It means there may be redness, swelling, or a little fluid in your child's middle ear. Ear infections are often painful. That can make it hard for your child to eat and sleep. Sometimes, they cause fever. Ear infections are common in young children. Most kids get at least one before they are 3 years old. They're often related to a cold or other illness.

What to Do for Pain.

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Family Physicians recommend starting an over-the-counter pain reliever, like acetaminophen or ibuprofen, on day 1 to relieve ear pain —whether or not an antibiotic is also prescribed.¹

What About Antibiotics?

Antibiotics are medicines that kill bacteria. Many ear infections don't need an antibiotic. They often get better on their own—just as quickly—without these medicines. Your doctor will look inside your child's ear to help decide the right way to treat it.

Your doctor may ask you to wait a day or two to see if your child gets better without an antibiotic. If an antibiotic is needed, make sure to follow your doctor's instructions.

Tips on Helping Your Child Avoid Ear Infections

Some kids tend to get more ear infections than others during early childhood, when their inner ears and immune systems are still developing. But there are ways that may help protect little ears from infection, including:

- Keeping children away from cigarette smoke
- Protecting children from cold and flu viruses
- Breastfeeding babies if possible, or making sure children don't drink from bottles while lying down
- Eliminating or cutting back on use of pacifiers, since sucking can pull germs into the middle ear
- Staying up to date on immunizations. The infant pneumococcal and HiB vaccines help lower the risk for ear infections. An annual flu shot for children older than 6 months also helps.

¹ American Academy of Pediatrics and American Academy of Family Physicians. Clinical practice guideline: Diagnosis and management of acute otitis media. *Pediatrics*. 2004;113:1454.