



Pediatric Clinic  
PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUTS  
**OTITIS MEDIA (EAR INFECTION)**

This information can guide the parents of most children most of the time. The best care for one child may be different from the best care for another. Together, you and your doctor can decide what is best for your child.

## **Why do children get ear infections?**

### **Some reasons are:**

- ❖ They are exposed to colds or allergy symptoms, especially when they are young;
- ❖ When babies are fed lying down, or the bottle is “propped” during feeding;
- ❖ People around them smoke; or
- ❖ Ear infections run in the family.

## **How do you know if your child might have an ear infection?**

- ❖ Some children will feel pain in their ear, or feel like their ear is plugged.
- ❖ Some will be fussy or have a fever.
- ❖ Some will pull at their ear.

## **What can you do about your child’s middle ear problem?**

- ❖ Call your child’s regular doctor...the one who is most familiar with your child’s health.
- ❖ If there is fever or pain, you can use a pain killer like Tylenol. Consult with your child’s doctor about the correct amount.
- ❖ You can help prevent ear infections by reducing your child’s exposure to cigarette smoke and other children with colds. Also, children who are breast-fed have fewer ear infections.

## **How do doctors decide if there is infection or fluid?**

- ❖ By looking in the child’s ear. There are simple tests that help a doctor determine if there is infection or fluid.

## **What is the best medical treatment?**

- *Some ear infections will heal themselves and need no medical treatment.*
- ❖ Some will need antibiotics. It is not always necessary to start antibiotics right away.
- ❖ Your child’s doctor will choose the best antibiotic based on any history of ear infections or antibiotic use and any known allergies.
- ❖ You can help your doctor determine the best treatment by keeping family health records.

## What if the infections or fluid continue?

- ❖ Sometimes antibiotics can be used to prevent repeated infections.
- ❖ Some children need ear tubes if nothing else works. The tubes drain the fluid and allow the ear to heal.

## What can parents do after treatment begins?

- ❖ Parents usually know best whether the treatment is working or if their child needs to see the doctor again. Call your child's regular doctor if you continue to be concerned about his or her condition.
- ❖ A follow-up visit is usually not necessary until a month after treatment, except in special cases, such as very young children and those with a history of ear problems.
- *It is very important to follow the doctor's instructions, to give your child all of any antibiotic prescribed and to schedule and attend follow-up visits as recommended.*

## What are the long-term effects of ear infections?

- ❖ Most children have no long-term problems from ear infections.
- ❖ Children who have a lot of infections may have hearing or speech problems, and should see their doctor regularly for testing.
- ❖ When children are learning to talk, it is particularly important that their ear infections are treated properly. Children need to hear well to learn to speak.

The ear has three parts – the outer ear, the middle ear, and the inner ear. The outer ear includes the part outside the head and the ear canal; the eardrum is a small circle of tissue at the end of the ear canal. The middle ear, which is usually filled with air, is the space behind the eardrum. The inner ear is further inside the head and is important for hearing and balance. Middle ear infections are very common in children. An infection causes inflammation and, some-times, fluid buildup in the middle ear.

