

What you need
to know about...

Ear Infections



What is an ear infection?

Ear infections—also called *otitis media* (o-TI-tis ME-de-a)—often start with a cold virus or other illness. This can lead to redness, swelling, and a little fluid in your child’s middle ear. Ear infections are usually painful, making it hard for a child to eat and sleep. Sometimes, they cause fever (temperature of 100.4°F or higher). If you think your child has ear pain or you see fluid coming out of the ear, call your doctor.

What if the ear infection is causing a lot of pain?

Most children with an ear infection do have a lot of pain. Babies may rub their ears, have trouble sleeping, or have temper tantrums. The main medicines for relieving the pain of an ear infection are acetaminophen (found in Children’s **TYLENOL**®) and ibuprofen (found in Children’s **MOTRIN**®)—not antibiotics. Ask your doctor for his or her recommendation on which pain reliever to use.

Pain relievers should be given as soon as you know your child has an ear infection, and especially before bedtime since lying down can increase pain. Fortunately, after 24 hours, more than half of children feel better; and almost all feel better within a few days. Antibiotics won’t relieve ear pain in the first 24 hours, and most children’s ear infections get better without them.

Tips to help 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 steps you can take that may help protect little ears from infection, including:

- Protecting children from colds and flu viruses, by encouraging frequent hand-washing and keeping them away from others who are sick
- Not letting children drink from bottles or cups while lying down. This lets fluid and germs flow into the middle ear
- Staying up to date on immunizations. The infant pneumococcal and meningitis vaccines help lower the risk for ear infections. An annual flu vaccine also helps
- Keeping children away from cigarette smoke. The fumes and dust increase a child’s risk for fluid build-up in the ear and infection