

Earache

Earache and ear pain affect both children and adults. It is particularly common in young children.

Earache usually comes on suddenly and the pain can be quite severe. The severe pain generally lasts only a day or 2. It is not usually a sign of anything serious.

Most earaches are caused by a virus so antibiotics do not help.

Symptoms of earache

Earache and ear pain can affect one or both ears.

The main symptoms of earache are:

- severe pain (caused by the pressure of mucus on the eardrum)
- a [high temperature](#) - 38 degrees Celsius or above
- slight hearing loss

Prevent the spread of COVID-19

A high temperature can be a symptom of COVID-19.

[Get advice about symptoms of COVID-19 and what to do](#)

A [sore throat](#) can also cause earache.

If there is no fever or temperature, the earache may be caused by a [wax blockage](#) or glue ear. Glue ear is where the empty middle part of the ear canal fills up with fluid.

Sometimes the pressure can cause the eardrum to burst and fluid may come out of the ear. Do not worry if this happens. Keep the ear dry and contact your GP.

Symptoms of earache in babies and young children

About three-quarters of ear infections happen in children under 10 years of age.

Most earaches in children are caused by viral infections that will clear up by themselves in 3 to 4 days.

A young child with earache might also:

- have a temperature of 38 degrees Celsius or above
- rub or pull their ear
- not react to some sounds
- be irritable or restless
- not want to eat
- keep losing their balance

Treatment for earache

Usually, pain relief is the only treatment needed for earache and ear pain.

You can take over-the-counter medicines to help with the pain and high temperature. Ask your pharmacist for advice.

Antibiotics will not reduce the pain of an ear infection. Do not take antibiotics for an ear infection unless your GP prescribes them. Ear infections are generally caused by viruses and antibiotics cannot treat viruses.

Read more about [antibiotics](#)

After an ear infection, you may still have fluid behind your eardrum. This can last for several months. Your ear may feel uncomfortable. It will be more of a dull, abnormal feeling than a sharp pain. This may also affect your hearing until the fluid is gone.

Do

- ✓ use painkillers such as [paracetamol](#) or ibuprofen (do not give aspirin to children under 16)

Don't

- ✗ do not put anything inside your ear, such as cotton buds
- ✗ do not try to remove earwax

When to contact your GP

Usually, you do not need to contact your GP if you have an earache.

Contact your GP if your earache does not improve within 3 to 4 days.

You should also contact your GP if you have an earache and:

- dizziness
- severe headache
- fluid, blood or discharge coming from your ear

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