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Ear Infections

Also called: Otitis media

Ear infections are the most common reason parents bring their child to a doctor. Three out of four children will have at least one ear infection by their third birthday. Adults can also get ear infections, but they are less common.

The infection usually affects the middle ear and is called otitis media. The tubes inside the ears become clogged with fluid and mucus. This can affect hearing, because sound cannot get through all that fluid.

If your child isn't old enough to say "My ear hurts," here are a few things to look for:

- Tugging at ears
- Crying more than usual
- Fluid draining from the ear
- Trouble sleeping
- Balance difficulties
- Hearing problems

Your health care provider will diagnose an ear infection by looking inside the ear with an instrument called an otoscope.

Often, ear infections go away on their own. Your health care provider may recommend pain relievers. Severe infections and infections in young babies may require antibiotics.

Children who get infections often may need surgery to place small tubes inside their ears. The tubes relieve pressure in the ears so that the child can hear again.

NIH: National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders

Start Here

- Ear Infection (Middle Ear) [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/ear-infections/symptoms-causes/syc-20351616?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/ear-infections/symptoms-causes/syc-20351616?p=1>]
- Ear Infection Symptoms and Treatment [<https://familydoctor.org/condition/ear-infection/?adfree=true>] (American Academy of Family Physicians)
Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/condicion/infeccion-de-oido-es/?adfree=true>]
- Ear Infections in Children [<https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/ear-infections-children>]
 (National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/es/espanol/infecciones-del-oido-en-los-ninos>]
- Middle Ear Infections (Otitis Media) [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/otitis-media.html>]  (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/otitis-media.html>]

Diagnosis and Tests

- Ear Problems [<https://familydoctor.org/symptom/ear-problems/?adfree=true>] (American Academy of Family Physicians)
Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/sintoma/problemas-de-vido/?adfree=true>]

Prevention and Risk Factors

- Can I Prevent Ear Infections When My Child Swims? (For Parents) [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/ear-infections-swimming.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/ear-infections-swimming.html>]

Treatments and Therapies

- Ear Infection Basics [<https://www.cdc.gov/ear-infection/about/>] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- Ear Infections in Children: Information for Parents [<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/ear-nose-throat/Pages/Ear-Infection-Information.aspx>] (American Academy of Pediatrics)
- Ear tube insertion - series -- Normal anatomy [https://medlineplus.gov/ency/presentations/100045_1.htm] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/esp_presentations/100045_1.htm]
- Ear Tubes [https://www.enthealth.org/be_ent_smart/ear-tubes/] (American Academy of Otolaryngology--Head and Neck Surgery)
- Eardrum repair - series [https://medlineplus.gov/ency/presentations/100015_1.htm] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/esp_presentations/100015_1.htm]
- How to Use Ear Drops [<https://www.safemedication.com/how-to-use-medication/ear-drops>] (American Society of Health-System Pharmacists)

Related Issues

- Cholesteatoma [<https://www.enthealth.org/conditions/cholesteatoma/>] (American Academy of Otolaryngology--Head and Neck Surgery)
- Ototoxicity (Ear Poisoning) (For Parents) [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/ototoxicity.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/ototoxicity.html>]
- Ruptured Eardrum (Perforated Eardrum) [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/ruptured-eardrum/symptoms-causes/syc-20351879?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)

Specifics

- Labyrinthitis and Vestibular Neuritis [<https://vestibular.org/article/diagnosis-treatment/types-of-vestibular-disorders/labyrinthitis-and-vestibular-neuritis/>] (Vestibular Disorders Association)
- Swimmer's Ear (For Parents) [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/swimmer-ear.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/swimmer-ear.html>]

Test Your Knowledge

- Ear Infection Myths & Facts Quiz [https://medlineplus.gov/ency/quiz/000638_47.htm] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/quiz/000638_102.htm]

Statistics and Research

- Statistics about Hearing, Balance, Ear Infections and Deafness [<https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/statistics>]
 (National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders)

Clinical Trials

- ClinicalTrials.gov: Otitis Media [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Otitis+Media%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)

Journal Articles

References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)

- Article: Evaluation of Streptococcus pneumoniae as a cause of acute otitis media... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40720527>]
- Article: Audiological and Otologic Characteristics of Patients with Musical Hallucinations. [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40693796>]
- Article: Global, regional and national burdens of otitis media in children and... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40678646>]
- Ear Infections -- see more articles [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%22Otitis+Media%22%5Bmajr%3Aexp%5D+AND+humans%5Bmh%5D+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND+%22last+1+Year%22+%5Bdat%5D+NOT+%28letter%5Bpt%5D+OR+case+reports%5Bpt%5D+OR+editorial%5Bpt%5D+OR+comment%5Bpt%5D%29+AND+free+full+text%5Bsb%5D+>]

Reference Desk

- Glossary [<https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/glossary>]  (National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders)

Find an Expert

- American Academy of Otolaryngology--Head and Neck Surgery [<https://www.entnet.org/>]
- Find an ENT (Ear, Nose, and Throat Specialist) [<https://www.enthealth.org/find-ent/>] (American Academy of Otolaryngology--Head and Neck Surgery)
- National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders [<https://www.nidcd.nih.gov>] 

Children

- Ear Tube Surgery (For Parents) [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/ear-infections.html>]  (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/ear-infections.html>]
- Ear Tube Surgery (Myringotomy) (For Parents) [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/ear-tube-surgery-animation.html>]  (Nemours Foundation)
- Swimmer's Ear [<https://kidshealth.org/en/kids/swimmers-ear.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
- Tympanoplasty [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/tympanoplasty.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/tympanoplasty.html>]
- What Is an Ear Infection? [<https://kidshealth.org/en/kids/ear-infection.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/kids/ear-infection.html>]
- Your Ears [<https://kidshealth.org/en/kids/ears.html>]  (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/kids/ear.html>]

Teenagers

- Swimmer's Ear (External Otitis) [<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/swimmers-ear.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/teens/swimmers-ear.html>]

Patient Handouts

- Cholesteatoma [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001050.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/001050.htm>]

- Ear discharge [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003042.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/003042.htm>]
- Ear examination [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003340.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/003340.htm>]
- Ear infection - acute [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000638.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/000638.htm>]
- Ear infection - chronic [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000619.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/000619.htm>]
- Ear tube insertion [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003015.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/003015.htm>]
- Earache [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003046.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/003046.htm>]
- Otitis media with effusion [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007010.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/007010.htm>]
- Swimmer's ear [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000622.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/000622.htm>]



MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

- Cholesteatoma [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001050.htm>]
- Ear discharge [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003042.htm>]
- Ear drainage culture [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003763.htm>]
- Ear examination [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003340.htm>]
- Ear infection - acute [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000638.htm>]
- Ear infection - chronic [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000619.htm>]
- Ear tube insertion [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003015.htm>]
- Ear tube insertion - series -- Normal anatomy [https://medlineplus.gov/ency/presentations/100045_1.htm]
- Ear tube surgery - what to ask your doctor [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000220.htm>]
- Earache [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003046.htm>]
- Eardrum repair [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003014.htm>]
- Eardrum repair - series [https://medlineplus.gov/ency/presentations/100015_1.htm]
- Infectious myringitis [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001369.htm>]
- Labyrinthitis [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001054.htm>]

Labyrinthitis - aftercare [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000716.htm>]

Malignant otitis externa [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000672.htm>]

Mastoidectomy [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003016.htm>]

Mastoiditis [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001034.htm>]

Otitis [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001336.htm>]

Otitis media with effusion [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007010.htm>]

Perichondritis [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001253.htm>]

Petrositis [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001254.htm>]

Ruptured eardrum [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001038.htm>]

Swimmer's ear [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000622.htm>]

National Institutes of Health

The primary NIH organization for research on *Ear Infections* is the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders [<https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/>]

Other Languages

Find health information in languages other than English [<https://medlineplus.gov/languages/earinfections.html>] on *Ear Infections*

NIH MedlinePlus Magazine

Help Your Child through Winter Ear Infections [<https://magazine.medlineplus.gov/article/help-your-child-through-winter-ear-infections>]

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