

# FACTS ABOUT

## Ear Infections (Otitis Media)

Ear Infections are very common among children. Most children will have had at least one by 3 years of age.

An ear infection usually follows a cold, and it is easy to mistake one for the other because they share many of the same symptoms. In addition, both infections can make your child seem very sick with high fever, lack of energy, and loss of appetite. But unlike colds, ear infections are caused by bacteria. This means that ear infections can be treated with antibiotics.

Unlike colds, ear infections cause earaches. Older children can tell you if they have an earache. Young children and infants may simply become irritable and fussy.

Physicians treat children's ear infections with antibiotics. There are several different antibiotics that work equally well.

The antibiotic should make your child feel better within 2 or 3 days. However, in order to cure the infection, it is very important to give your child all the antibiotic that has been prescribed. The physician may also recommend a painkiller (for example, acetaminophen) to relieve discomfort from the earache.

The majority of ear infections are not serious, but sometimes complications such as hearing loss can occur.

In some children, the ear infection causes fluid to collect in the middle ear. The fluid may last for as long as three months. Children with this will not have a fever or an earache (the usual signs of an ear infection), but their hearing may be affected. Most children get better without any medical treatment. Others may need medication or surgery (tubes in the ears) to correct the problem.

### Things Parents Can Do

- If you suspect your child has an ear infection, contact your physician. Your physician will have to examine the child's ears to make the diagnosis.
- Keep in mind that ear infections usually get better with antibiotics, but it is important to take all of the medication prescribed. In addition, complication may occur. Contact your physician if your child shows any of the following signs:
  - an earache that becomes worse in spite of treatment
  - a high fever over 39°C (102°F) in spite of treatment, or a fever that lasts more than three days
  - excessive sleepiness
  - excessive crankiness or fussiness
  - a skin rash
  - rapid or difficult breathing
  - hearing loss
- Your child may continue attending school if feeling well enough to take part in the activities.

Adapted from Canadian Paediatric Society "Well Beings"

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