

Ear Infection - Viral

Definition

- A viral infection of the middle ear (the space behind the eardrum)

Health Information

Symptoms

- Mild or moderate earache
- Younger children may act fussy or poke at their ear
- The main symptom may be ear congestion
- Symptoms of a common cold also present. This includes a runny or congested nose, and a cough.

Diagnosis

- A doctor can diagnose a viral ear infection by looking at the eardrum. It will be red but not bulging.

Cause

- Blocked eustachian tube, usually as part of a common cold. The eustachian tube joins the middle ear to the back of the throat. Blockage results in middle ear fluid (called viral otitis).
- A viral ear infection sometimes turns into a bacterial one. If the fluid becomes infected, the fluid turns to pus (bacterial otitis).
- This causes the eardrum to bulge out and can cause lots of pain.

Care Advice

1. Overview:

- Most viral ear infections get better on their own.
- Your main job is to control the pain.
- Here is some care advice that should help.

2. Pain Medicine:

- To help with the pain, give acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) or ibuprofen. Use as needed.

3. Fever:

- For fevers above 102° F (39° C), give acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) or ibuprofen. Note: Lower fevers are important for fighting infections.
- For ALL fevers: Keep your child well hydrated. Give lots of cold fluids.

4. Antibiotic Not Needed:

- Antibiotics don't help viral infections.
- They can only kill bacteria.

5. **Nasal Washes To Open a Blocked Nose:**

- **STEP 1:** Use saline nose drops or spray to loosen up the dried mucus. If you don't have saline, you can use warm tap water. Put 3 drops in each nostril. (If age under 1 year old, use 1 drop. Also, do 1 side at a time.)
- **STEP 2:** Blow (or suction) each nostril out while closing off the other nostril. Then, do the other side.
- **STEP 3:** Repeat nose drops and blowing (or suctioning) until the discharge is clear.
- **How often:** Do nasal washes when your child can't breathe through the nose. Limit: No more than 4 times per day.
- Saline nose drops or spray can be bought in any drugstore. No prescription is needed.
- Saline nose drops can also be made at home. Use 1/2 teaspoon (2 ml) of table salt. Stir the salt into 1 cup (8 ounces or 240 ml) of warm water.
- **Reason for nose drops:** Suction or blowing alone can't remove dried or sticky mucus. Also, babies can't nurse or drink from a bottle unless the nose is open.
- **Other option:** use a warm shower to loosen mucus. Breathe in the moist air, then blow each nostril.
- For young children, can also use a wet cotton swab to remove sticky mucus.

6. **Medicines for Colds:**

- **Age Limit.** Before 4 years, never use any cough or cold medicines. Reason: Unsafe and not approved by the FDA. Also, do not use products that contain more than one medicine.
- **Cold Medicines.** They are not advised. Reason: They can't remove dried mucus from the nose. Nasal washes are the answer.
- **Decongestants.** Decongestants by mouth (such as Sudafed) are not advised. They may help nasal congestion in older children. But, decongestant nasal spray is preferred after age 12.
- **Allergy Medicines.** They are not helpful, unless your child also has nasal allergies. They can also help an allergic cough.

7. **What to Expect:**

- Most children get better slowly over 2 to 3 days.
- Ear congestion may last until the cold is gone.

8. **Return to School:**

- Your child can return to school or child care when any fever is gone.
- Your child should feel well enough to join in normal activities.
- Ear infections cannot be spread to others.

Call Your Doctor If

- Fever lasts more than 3 days
- Ear pain becomes worse
- Ear discharge occurs
- You think your child needs to be seen
- Your child becomes worse

Pediatric Care Advice

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