

# Ear Infections - Prevention

## Definition

- Advice about how to prevent recurrent ear infections

## Health Information

### Cause of Ear Infections

- 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). If the fluid becomes infected (bacterial otitis), the fluid turns to pus. This causes the eardrum to bulge out and can cause a lot of pain.
- Ear infections peak at age 6 months to 2 years. They are a common problem until age 8.
- The onset of ear infections is often on day 3 of a cold.
- How often do kids get ear infections? 90% of children have at least 1 ear infection. Frequent ear infections occur in 20% of children. Ear infections are the most common bacterial infection of young children.

## Care Advice

1. **Overview:**
  - Some children have ear infections that keep coming back.
  - If this is your child's problem, here are some ways to prevent future ones.
2. **Avoid Tobacco Smoke:**
  - Contact with tobacco smoke can lead to ear infections. It also makes them harder to treat.
  - No one should smoke around your child. This includes in your home, your car or at child care.
3. **Breastfeed:**
  - Breastfeed your baby during the first 6 to 12 months of life.
  - Antibodies in breast milk lower the rate of ear infections.
4. **Do Not Prop the Bottle:**
  - During feedings, hold your baby with the head higher than the stomach.
  - Feeding while lying down flat can lead to ear infections. Reason: It causes formula to flow back into the middle ear.
  - Also, don't let babies hold their own bottle. This also causes milk to drain into the middle ear.
5. **Get All Suggested Vaccines:**
  - Vaccines protect your child from serious infections.
  - The pneumococcal and flu shots also help to prevent some ear infections.
6. **Try To Avoid Colds:**
  - Most ear infections start with a cold. During the first year of life, try to reduce contact with other sick children.
  - Try to put off using a large child care center during the first year. Instead, try using a sitter in your home. Another option might be a small home-based child care.

**7. Check Any Snoring:**

- Large adenoids can cause snoring or mouth breathing. Suspect this if your toddler snores every night or breathes through his mouth.
- Large adenoids can contribute to ear infections.
- Talk to your child's doctor about this.

**8. Control Allergies:**

- Allergies may lead to some ear infections. Reason: by causing nose and ear congestion.
- If your baby has a constant runny or blocked nose, suspect an allergy.
- If your child has other allergies such as eczema, he may have a milk allergy. It can be to cow's milk or soy milk protein.
- For any allergy symptoms, talk with your child's doctor.

**9. Ear Tubes Surgery:**

- Ear tubes help the middle ear to drain and heal.
- Ear infections that occur 3 or more times in 6 months may need tubes.
- Ear infections that do not clear up after trying many antibiotics may need tubes.
- If prevention fails, your child's doctor may consider ear tubes.

## Call Your Doctor If

- Your child develops symptoms of an ear infection
- You have other questions or concerns

### Pediatric Care Advice

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