

Earache - Symptom

Definition

- Pain in or around the ear (an earache)
- The older child complains about ear pain
- Younger child acts like he did with last ear infection or cries a lot
- Symptoms of a cold are also often present when ear infections are the cause. These can include a runny nose, sore throat and cough. May also have a fever.

Health Information

Causes

- Usually due to an ear infection of the middle ear (space behind the eardrum)
- Ear infections can be caused by viruses or bacteria. Usually, a doctor can tell the difference by looking at the eardrum.
- Ear infections peak at age 6 months to 2 years
- The onset of ear infections is often on day 3 of a cold
- Problems in the ear canal can also cause ear pain. Examples are swimmer's ear or a big piece of earwax. A cotton swab or fingernail can cause a scrape in the canal.
- Ear pain can also be referred pain from a tonsil infection or tooth decay.

Care Advice

1. Overview:

- Your child may have an ear infection. The only way to be sure is to look at the eardrum.
- It is safe to wait until your doctor's office is open.
- Ear pain can be helped with pain medicine and eardrops.
- Here is some care advice that should help until you see your doctor.

2. Pain Medicine:

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

3. Cold Pack:

- Put a cold wet washcloth on the outer ear for 20 minutes. This should help the pain until the pain medicine starts to work.
- Note: Some children prefer heat for 20 minutes.
- Caution: Do not keep hot or cold packs on too long. This could cause a burn or frostbite.

4. Eardrops:

- If pain medicine does not help the pain, try eardrops. You can use plain olive oil or mineral oil (baby oil).
- Use 3 drops every 4 hours.
- Prescription eardrops for pain are sometimes used. (Same dose).
- Caution: Don't use eardrops if your child has ear tubes. Also, don't use if your child has a hole in the eardrum.

5. **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.

6. **Return to School:**

- Can return to school or child care when the fever is gone.
- An ear infection cannot be spread to others.

Call Your Doctor If

- Pain becomes severe
- Pus drains out of the ear canal
- Your child becomes worse

Pediatric Care Advice

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