

EAR INFECTION (Otitis media)

TO YOUR HEALTH - PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

7.5

DESCRIPTION

Inflammation and infection in the middle ear. This is not contagious from person to person, but a preceding respiratory infection causing it may be infectious. The middle-ear is the space between the eardrum and the eustachian tube.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Earache
- Feeling of fullness in the ear
- Hearing may be reduced
- Fever
- Discharge or leakage from the ear
- Dizziness

CAUSES

The ear infection is usually caused by bacteria, and less often by a virus. The infection creates a build up of fluid or pus in the middle ear. Middle ear infections often occur after a cold or other illness of the nose or throat.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Recent illness, such as a cold or sore throat
- Winter and spring seasons
- Family history of ear infections
- Smoking and second hand smoke
- Asthma, allergies, or previous ear infections

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

No smoking in household.
Wash hands often to avoid spread of germs that can cause colds and sore throats

EXPECTED OUTCOME

Curable with treatment.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- May recur
- Chronic otitis media
- Hearing impairment usually temporary, but sometimes permanent leading to delay of normal language development in children.
- Rarely, more serious ear problems and other complications may occur

GENERAL MEASURES

Diagnosis is usually made by examination of the ear. Treatment usually involves medication and supportive care to relieve pain. Not all infections need antibiotic treatment. Apply heat (warm wash cloth) to the area around the ear to relieve pain. Swimming should be avoided until infection clears. Surgery to insert plastic tubes through the eardrum to drain pus or fluid from the middle ear (rare in adults); or surgery to remove the adenoids.

MEDICATION

Use non-prescription drugs, such as acetaminophen, to reduce pain and fever and oral decongestants such as pseudoephedrine or phenylephrine to open nasal passages. Antibiotics may be prescribed, if the infection appears to be bacterial rather than viral. Finish all the medication. The infection may remain active for several days after symptoms disappear. Ear drops may be prescribed.

ACTIVITY & DIET

- Rest as needed until fever and pain subside.
- Avoid swimming until condition clears.

NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF...

- Fever
- Severe headache
- Earache that persists longer than 2 days, despite treatment
- Swelling around the ear
- Dizziness
- Drainage from the ear
- Hearing loss

Student Health Center



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This information is for educational purposes only. Consult your doctor for specific medical advice, diagnosis and treatment.

618-453-3311

Dial-A-Nurse is available after-hours until 10:30 p.m. during fall and spring semesters. In case of emergency dial 911.