

MY CHILD HAS A MIDDLE EAR INFECTION: IS AN ANTIBIOTIC NECESSARY?

Your doctor has just told you that your child has a middle ear infection. Some information to help you in the next week or so.

What is a middle ear infection?

Middle ear infection is an infection in the small space just behind the eardrum that is common in young children. It is also called otitis media and usually causes an earache.

Most children will have at least one middle ear infection by 3 years of age.

Middle ear infections are more common in winter and early spring and often follow a simple common cold.

Will antibiotics help right now?

Middle ear infections can be due to either viruses or bacteria. Most children (80%) recover from the pain of their infection within 24 hours without antibiotics.

Your child's own immune system will be able to get rid of the infection in a few days in most cases.

Research shows that antibiotics do not relieve earache in the first 24 hours of use but may reduce pain thereafter.

What are the disadvantages of antibiotics?

- Giving your child unnecessary antibiotics can be harmful.
- Using antibiotics when you don't need them may make them less effective when you really need them.
- Antibiotics can cause unpleasant side effects such as skin rashes, diarrhoea and vomiting.

How can I help my child feel better?

The doctor examined your child and although your child is unwell, no serious illness has been found that needs antibiotics.

Therefore, the doctor has given you advice on how to treat the ear infection and may have asked you to bring your child back if there is no improvement or worsening of symptoms. Your doctor may provide a prescription for an antibiotic at this stage.

Helping your child during a middle ear infection

1. Pain relief is the best thing for your child.
2. Paracetamol or ibuprofen should be given if the earache recurs. Check the package for the correct dose for your child. Do not exceed the specified dose. Contact your doctor if you need to use it for more than 48 hours unless advised by the doctor.

When should I return to the doctor?

- You should take your child back to the doctor if he/she is not recovering in _____ days.
- You should take your child to the doctor if you feel your child's ear infection is getting worse.

Is there anything I should look out for?

Should you find that your child becomes sicker or develops any new or worrying symptoms such as swelling or redness behind the ear, contact your doctor.

Sometimes there is a persistent ear pain that continues after a middle ear infection. Your doctor may suggest a return visit to check that your child is hearing normally again.