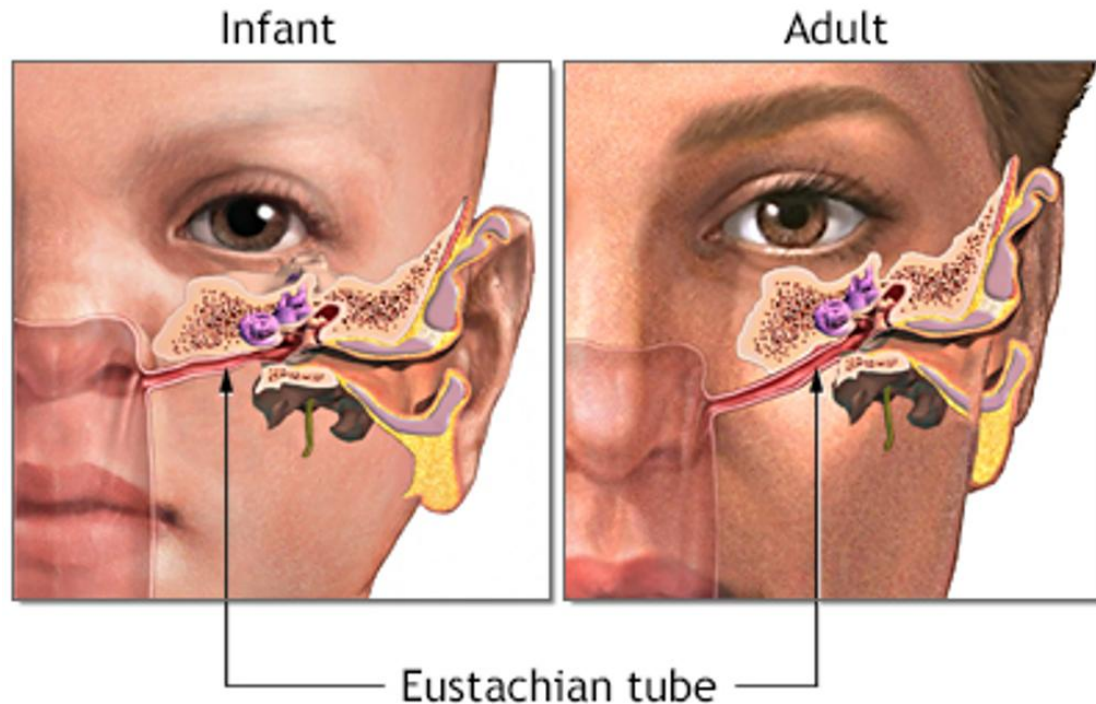


Ear infections (otitis media) A Comprehensive Guide

What is an Ear Infection?

An ear infection, medically termed acute otitis media (AOM), occurs when the middle ear—the space behind the eardrum—becomes inflamed due to bacterial or viral infections. Ear infections are most common in those between 6 months and 2 years old and are typically preceded by a cold. In infants and young children, the eustachian tube (which connects the middle ear to the nasal cavity) is narrower and more horizontal than in older children, teens, or adults. This makes it easier for mucus from the nose to get trapped in the tube, building up behind the eardrum. On top of that, since it's hard for infants and toddlers to clear mucus from their noses—whether by suctioning or blowing their nose—it tends to stay in the area behind the eardrum for longer periods. This can lead to ear infections.



How to Prevent an Ear Infection

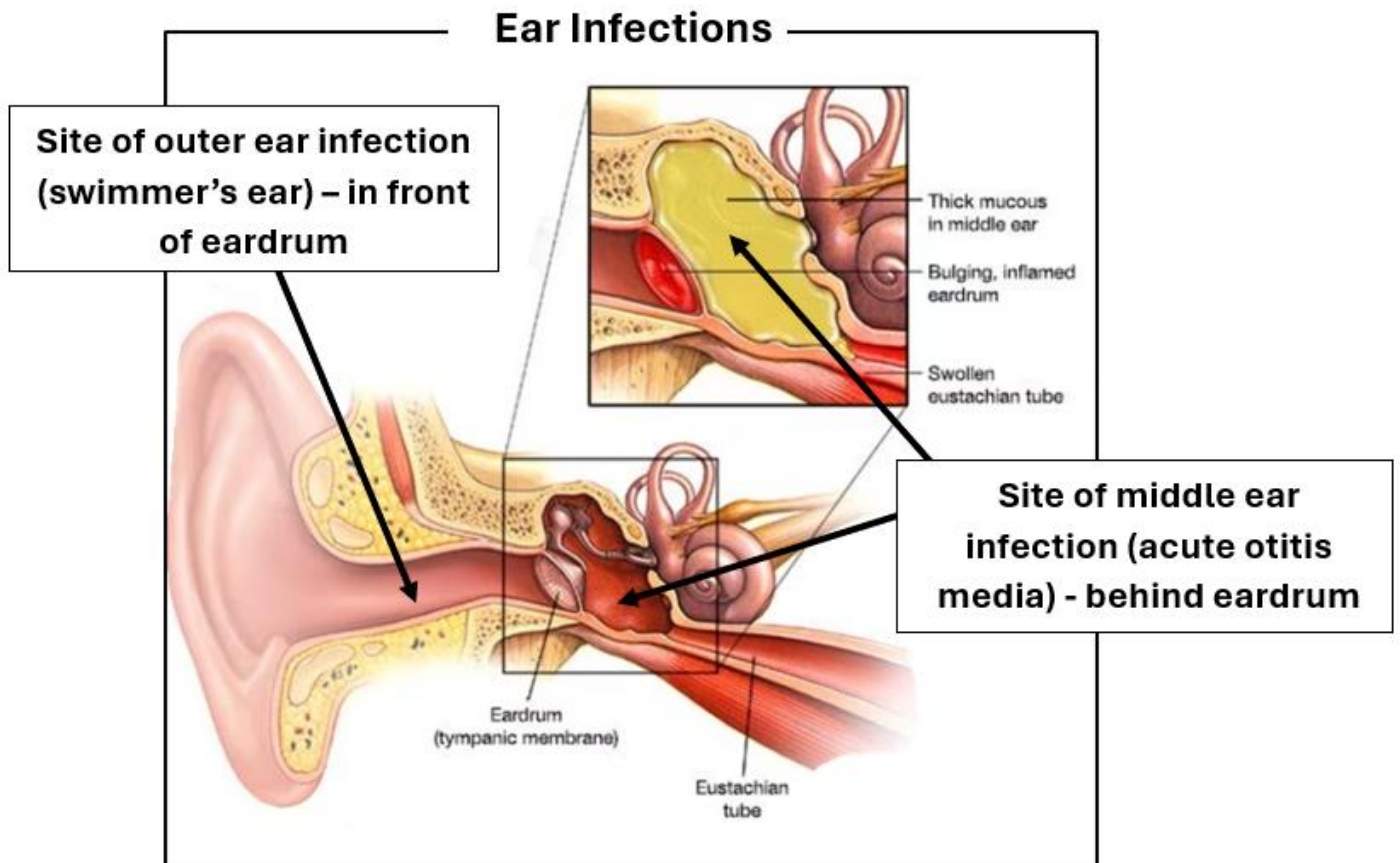
Unfortunately, despite your best efforts, ear infections can still occur; however, there are a few things you can control:

- Keeping up to date on routine childhood vaccinations (PCV, Hib, Influenza)
- Feeding infants in an upright position, avoiding bottles when lying flat
- Helping infants and toddlers clear mucus from their noses—whether by using saline + suctioning and/or blowing their nose. This is especially important when cold symptoms are present.

When Does an Ear Infection Need Treatment?

Thankfully, antibiotics aren't needed as often as you might think. Since there's no easy way to test the fluid behind the eardrum to see if an infection is caused by a virus or bacteria, we rely on research to guide treatment. Studies show that viruses play a role in over 60% of ear infections. Many infections involve both viruses and bacteria, while a smaller number are caused by bacteria alone.

Because we strive to follow evidence-based medicine guidelines, we are careful about when to prescribe antibiotics. Studies show that without antibiotics, 60% of children start feeling better within 24 hours, and 80% recover within three days. This means that in many cases, it may be safe to “watch and wait” instead of using antibiotics right away and we consider several factors to determine this. Based on the child's age, the severity of symptoms, and whether one or both ears are affected, antibiotic treatment may be recommended immediately, considered within the next few days if symptoms worsen, or deemed unnecessary. In some cases, a safety net antibiotic prescription (SNAP) may be provided for parents to use only if symptoms do not improve within 48–72 hours. Your provider will discuss his/her



How to Help Your Child with an Ear Infection Feel Better

- **Pain Relief:** Administer over-the-counter pain relievers like acetaminophen or ibuprofen
- **Warm Compress:** Apply a warm cloth to the affected ear to reduce pain.
- **Rest and Hydration:** Encourage fluid intake and ample rest to support recovery.

When to Call Us

- Symptoms such as: intense ear pain, high fever, or swelling around or behind the ear
- Symptoms do not improve or worsen after 48 to 72 hours
- You observe fluid, pus, or blood draining from the ear. This could mean that the eardrum (tympanic membrane) has perforated, due to the pressure behind the eardrum. Likely, this could not have been prevented and sounds much worse than it is. Pain is often greatly diminished if this occurs and very often this heals on its own without complications.