



### **An Earache Can Be A Real Pain In The Ear!**

But ear aches don't have to be.

Ear aches are a common problem for many children. Some children can go through childhood with very few ear aches or none at all. Other children may stay at the doctor's office with ear aches. In learning how to combat ear aches, it is important to learn what causes ear aches. This will help parents prevent ear aches in their children.

What causes an ear ache?

The tube connecting the middle ear to the back of the nose is called the Eustachian. This tube allows fluid drain out of the middle ear. However, if that tube's lining is invaded by bacteria or viruses, the tube can become swollen and may fill up with a thick mucus. This leads to the inability of the fluid to drain normally. As bacteria grow in the fluid, pressure can build behind the ear drum and this causes pain.

Allergies, cold and other illnesses can cause the Eustachian tube to become blocked. When the adenoids become enlarged they can block the Eustachian tubes as well. These are all referred to as ear infections. They usually clear up within a week or two, but in the meantime they can be extremely painful and include fever and other symptoms. There are also times that an ear infection will last even longer than two weeks and may even become chronic. Additionally, even after the infection clears, the fluid can remain in the middle ear which can lead to even more infections and, in extreme cases, hearing loss.

What are symptoms of an ear ache?

Older children can tell you that their ear hurts. Their ear pain may also be accompanied with fever. Babies, however, and children who are too young to tell you where it hurts may cry or pull on their ear or ears. A child with an ear infection, regardless of age, may show signs of irritability, listlessness, have difficulty hearing and may not feel like eating or sleeping. This is particularly true with breastfed babies who have an ear ache. Because a breastfed baby suckles in a certain way that is different and more difficult than suckling from a bottle, this motion can irritate the baby's sore ears causing him or her to "go off his feed."

What is the treatment for ear aches?

There are several ways that a doctor may approach treating an ear ache. If the doctor suspects the infection to be bacterial, he or she may prescribe an antibiotic. Pain relievers, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol products) and ibuprofen (Advil and Motrin products) can offer some relief and reduce fever if it is present. Aspirin, however, is not recommended. Warm compresses or a heating pad applied over the ear may reduce the pain. There are also times when ear drops are prescribed.

When medications are prescribed, whether it is antibiotics or ear drops, it is imperative that they be administered as directed by the doctor. With antibiotics it is exceptionally crucial that they be given on time and that no doses are skipped.

What are some risk factors that may cause children to get ear aches?

Children who are around people who smoke are at a very high risk of getting ear infections. Additionally, if they have had previous ear infections or have a family history of ear infections can increase their risk. It is no big secret that children in day care are exposed to many more germs and viruses so this is a large risk. A child who was premature at birth or had a low birth weight may also be at a higher risk. If a child has frequent colds or other infections, takes a bottle to bed, uses a pacifier or has a nasal speech that is caused by large adenoids blocking the Eustachian tubes he or she may be more at risk of developing an ear ache. Interestingly, males tend to show a higher incidence of ear infections than females. However, knowing the risk factors and knowing if your child fits into any of these categories can be the best defense. Prevention can be the best medicine.

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