

EAR INFECTIONS & INFLAMMATION

Ear infections are extremely common - 5 out of 6 children will have an ear infection before turning 3 years old.

Otitis Media with Effusion

What is it? Sometimes referred to as “water behind the ears” or “glue ear”. It happens when water builds up behind the ear drum. It can cause discomfort, pain, hearing loss, or a feeling of being off-balance.

Pain is more common at night; when they are falling asleep and there are fewer distractions. Pain is also more common in the morning before school; when they are feeling anxious. It does not cause high temperatures.

Children who suffer from this may snore at night or may have had a recent cold/flu/upper respiratory tract infection. Small children may not complain of anything at all, but you may notice that they are not listening well, or that they need you to repeat things.

Why does it occur? The Eustachian tube is a small connection between the ear and the back of the nose. Fluid in the ear can drain out of the ear and into the back of the nose through this passage. BUT this passage may get blocked if there is an infection, causing swelling and inflammation.

How is it treated?

- Children who do not have language and communication problems - watch and wait. It usually gets better by itself within 3 months.
- Children who have language or communication problems - it is best to see an ENT specialist and an audiologist to see whether they have hearing loss and whether they need small tubes (grommets) placed in their ear drums to help drain the fluid. This is to help them hear and communicate better.

Are some children more at risk than other children? Yes. Children who have a cleft palate are more at risk of developing this, even if the cleft palate has been repaired. Children who live with other small children, and children who are in creche or nursery school get exposed to more germs and suffer from more infections than children who stay at home.

How can you help?

- Understand that it will most likely get better by itself.
- Give your child panado if you think that the pain is bad.
- Ask for help if you think that your child has a communication or language problem, or if you think that they have hearing loss.

Acute otitis media

What is it? It is an ear infection that has been present for less than 4 weeks. These children initially have pain, high temperatures and they are unwell. They may experience hearing loss, vomiting or pus draining from the ear.

Why does it happen? It is caused by germs. Small children do not have immune systems that fight infections as well as older children.

How is it treated?

- Children who are younger than 1 year old, or have another medical condition that can affect their immune system - antibiotics and pain medication.
- Older children or children who do not have immune system concerns - treat with panado at home for 3 days, and if there is no improvement take them to the clinic for antibiotics.
- Children who have more than 5 infections in one year, need to see an ENT specialist.

How can you help?

- Make sure that their immunisations are up to date.

Chronic otitis media

What is it? It is an ear infection that has been present for more than 4 weeks.

Why does it happen? It is caused by a hole in the ear drum, that has not healed. The hole makes it easier for them to get repeated infections. The infections are not always painful, but present with pus draining from the ear. In some cases, the hole in the ear drum may cause hearing loss.

How is it treated?

- Pus can be drained from the ear.
- Antibiotic ear drops.
- If the hole does not heal, an ENT specialist may repair the hole with a small operation.

How can you help?

- Try active listening techniques. (Resources available on our website.)
- Pus draining from the ear for more than 4 weeks is not normal and your child needs to be referred to an ENT specialist.

How can you help?

- Be aware.
- See how to drain pus from the ear (Resources available on our website.)
- Ask for help! You know your child better than anyone else!!!

