

Does your child have an ear infection?

Next to the common cold, **otitis media** (middle ear infection) is the most common illness in children. Most children will get otitis media by the time they are 3 years old, and many will have recurrent episodes.

Recognizing the symptoms and detecting ear infections early are important to ensure that the condition does not lead to more serious complications, such as hearing loss or other damage.

A study in the December 8, 1999, issue of *JAMA* studied a total of 168 sets of healthy twins and triplets to determine if family genes play a role in the duration and the recurrence of episodes of middle ear infection in young children. The researchers found that heredity appears to play a large role in **middle ear effusion** (fluid collecting in the middle ear), another type of ear problem.

RISK FACTORS:

The following factors may increase the risks of getting middle ear infection or middle ear effusion:

- Bottle-feeding rather than breast-feeding infants
- Exposure to secondhand smoke
- Attending a group child-care facility

TREATMENT:

For an active middle ear infection, many physicians recommend taking an antibiotic for 5 to 10 days. If a child is experiencing pain, the doctor may also recommend a pain reliever. Studies have shown that taking antibiotics can increase the rate of recovery, but antibiotics may not be necessary in every case. Once the infection clears, fluid may still remain in the middle ear for several weeks to months but usually disappears on its own.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

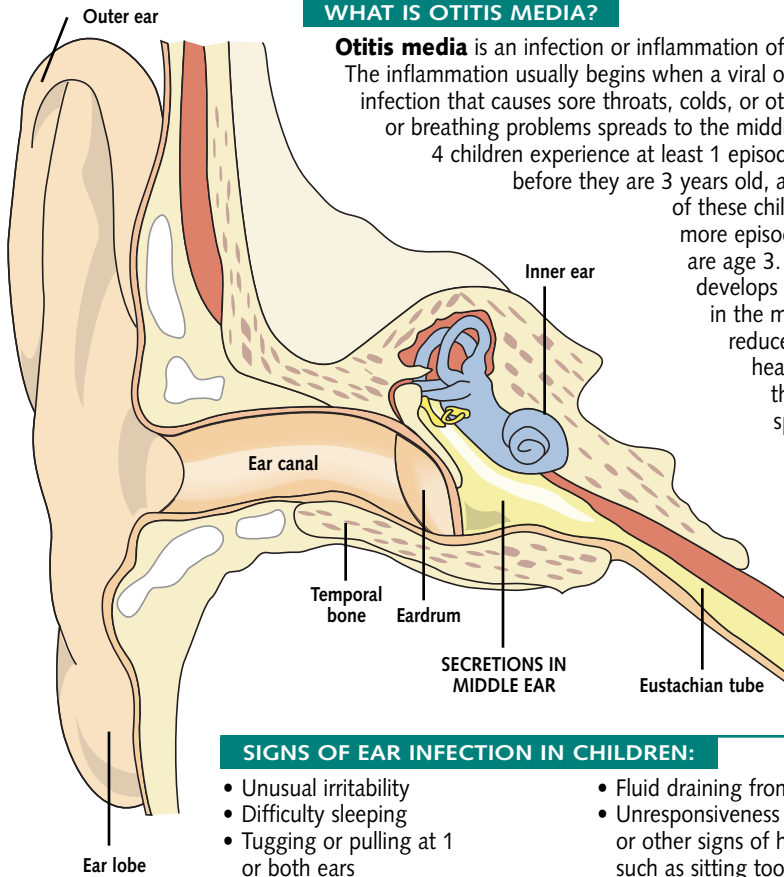
- National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders
National Institutes of Health
31 Center Drive, MSC 2320
Bethesda, MD 20892-2320
or www.nih.gov/nidcd
- Agency for Health Care Policy and Research
800/358-9295
888/586-6340 (TTY)
or www.ahrp.gov
- American Academy of Pediatrics
Ear Infections and Children
www.aap.org

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WHAT IS OTITIS MEDIA?

Otitis media is an infection or inflammation of the middle ear. The inflammation usually begins when a viral or bacterial infection that causes sore throats, colds, or other respiratory or breathing problems spreads to the middle ear. Three in 4 children experience at least 1 episode of otitis media before they are 3 years old, and almost half of these children have 3 or more episodes before they are age 3. If a child develops fluid persistently in the middle ear, it can reduce a child's hearing at a time that is crucial for speech and language development.



Source: *The Human Body: An Illustrated Guide to Its Structure, Function, and Disorders* (D K Publishing, 1995)

SIGNS OF EAR INFECTION IN CHILDREN:

- Unusual irritability
- Difficulty sleeping
- Tugging or pulling at 1 or both ears
- Fever
- Fluid draining from the ear
- Unresponsiveness to quiet sounds or other signs of hearing difficulty, such as sitting too close to the television or being inattentive

Additional Sources: Agency for Health Care Policy and Research, National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders

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