

Evidence Based Medicine Project – Plain Language Summary (PLS)

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FMCH 7600 – Period SP2 – 2012

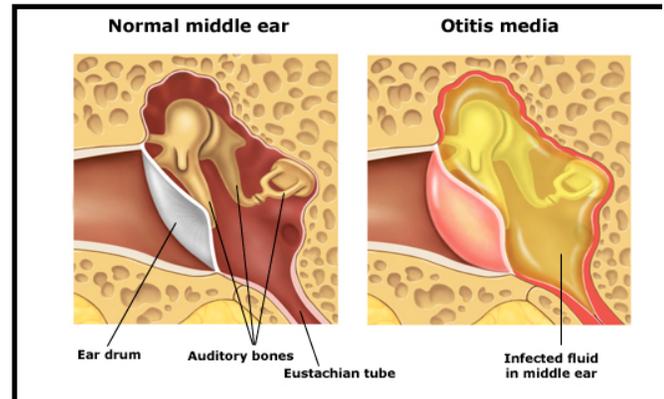
Bethesda Clinic – Preceptor: Dr. Casey Martin

Title: Ear Infections: How long does my child need to be treated?

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Plain Language Summary:

An ear infection is a result of bacteria (germs) causing damage behind the eardrum. It is also known as acute otitis media. Ear infections are common in children. In fact, the average toddler gets two or three each year. They often occur when a child catches a cold. This is because there are tubes near the back of the throat that lead to the ears. When a child catches a cold, germs can travel from the throat to the ear. Anyone can get an ear infection, but some children are more likely to get them. For example, children exposed to second-hand smoke, pacifiers, or daycare may get them more. Breastfeeding and vaccines can decrease the risk. For children who have many infections each year, a minor ear surgery can also reduce the risk.



When a toddler has an infected ear, they are often fussy and have fever or ear pain. Most ear infections heal on their own. In more serious cases, hearing may be affected or the infection may spread. If you believe your child's ear is infected, bring him to his doctor. A doctor can see if the ear is infected by inserting a small scope into the ear. It allows her to see the eardrum. If the doctor sees an infection, she may recommend giving medicine to help it heal faster. Many doctors treat ear infections with a week or more of antibiotics, a special medicine that kills germs.

Many doctors have studied how long the medicine should be used. So far, research shows that it works best when given for at least a week. This is why doctors typically prescribe antibiotics for at least a week. However, the medicines have side effects. They can cause stomach aches, diarrhea, or other problems for children. These side effects happen more when the medicine is used longer. So, some parents would prefer to use medicine as little as possible to treat the infection.

Recently, the results of several research studies were combined. The results showed that for children less than 2 years old, ear infections do not need to be treated as long. In fact, 2-6 days of treatment with antibiotics seems to be long enough for them. Many doctors may still recommend at least a week of antibiotics. However, this may not be necessary if your child is under 2 years old. If you are concerned about the side effects of the medicine, ask your doctor about the option of fewer days of medicine.

Additional Resources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/getsmart/antibiotic-use/URI/ear-infection.html>

Medline Plus Interactive Tutorial: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/tutorials/otitismedia/htm/lesson.htm>

Mayo Clinic: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/ear-infections/DS00303>

Key Words:

Acute Otitis Media

Ear Infection

Antibiotics

Duration

Short Course

This document was created by a medical student enrolled in the Family Medicine Clerkship at the University of Minnesota Medical School as part of the course project. The aim of the project is to present information on a medical topic in the format of a patient education handout. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Minnesota Medical School physicians and faculty. These materials are provided for informational purposes only and are in no way intended to take the place of the advice and recommendations of your personal health care provider. The information provided may no longer be up-to-date since it has not been reviewed since the date of creation. The information provided should not be used to diagnose a health problem or disease, or as a means of determining treatment. In the event of a medical emergency, immediately contact a doctor or call 911.

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