

# **EAR ACHE (MIDDLE EAR INFECTION)**

## About Middle Ear Infections

Inflammation in the middle ear area is known as otitis media. When referring to an ear infection, doctors most likely mean "acute otitis media" rather than the common ear infection called swimmer's ear, or otitis externa.

Acute otitis media is the presence of fluid, typically pus, in the middle ear with symptoms of pain, redness of the eardrum, and possible fever.

## Causes

Kids develop ear infections more frequently in the first 1 month to 4 years of life for several reasons:

- Their eustachian tubes are shorter and more horizontal than those of adults, which allows bacteria and viruses to find their way into the middle ear more easily. Their tubes are also narrower and less stiff, which makes them more prone to blockage.
- The adenoids, which are gland-like structures located in the back of the upper throat near the eustachian tubes, are large in children and can interfere with the opening of the eustachian tubes.

A number of other factors can contribute to kids getting ear infections, such as **breast feeding in lying down position**, **bottle-feeding**, and day-care attendance.

Ear infections also occur more commonly in boys than girls, in kids whose families have a history of ear infections, and during the winter season when upper respiratory tract infections or colds are frequent.

## Signs and Symptoms

The signs and symptoms of acute otitis media may range from very mild to severe:

- The fluid in the middle ear may push on the eardrum, causing ear pain. An older child may complain of an earache, but a younger child may tug at the ear or simply act irritable and cry more than usual.
- **Lying down, chewing, and sucking** can also cause painful pressure changes in the middle ear, so a child may eat less than normal or have trouble sleeping.

If the pressure from the fluid buildup is high enough, it can cause the eardrum to rupture, resulting in drainage of fluid from the ear. This releases the pressure behind the eardrum, usually bringing relief from the pain.

## Signs of Hearing Difficulties

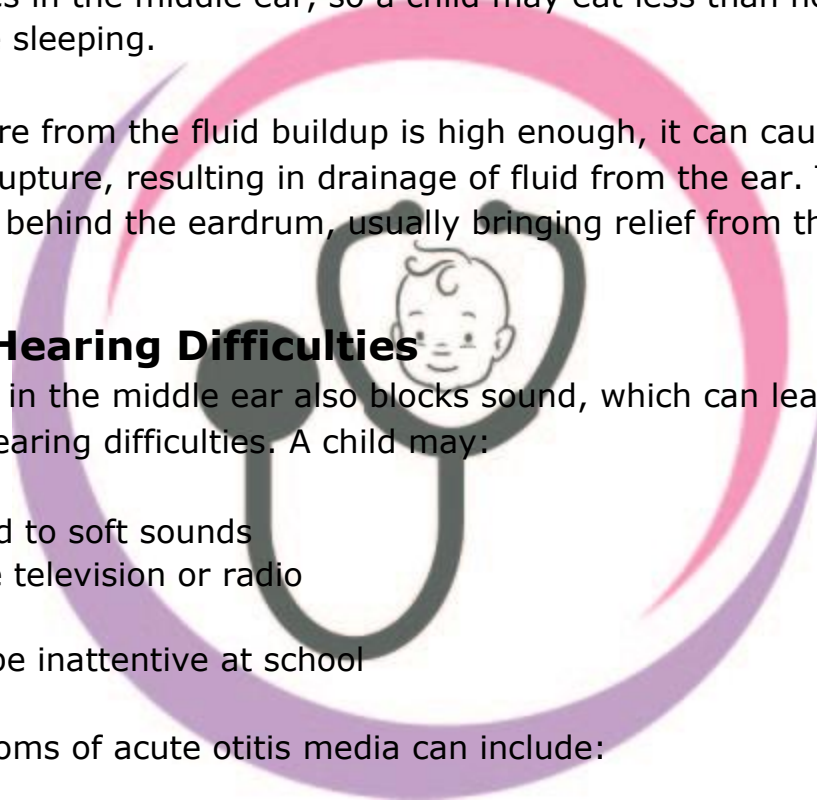
Fluid buildup in the middle ear also blocks sound, which can lead to temporary hearing difficulties. A child may:

- not respond to soft sounds
- turn up the television or radio
- talk louder
- appear to be inattentive at school

Other symptoms of acute otitis media can include:

- fever
- nausea
- vomiting
- dizziness

However, otitis media with effusion often has no symptoms. In some kids, the fluid that's in the middle ear may create a sensation of ear fullness or "popping." As with acute otitis media, the fluid behind the eardrum can block sound, so mild temporary hearing loss can happen, but might not be obvious.



Ear infections are also frequently associated with upper respiratory tract infections and, therefore, with their common signs and symptoms, such as a runny or stuffy nose or a cough.

## **Contagiousness**

Ear infections are *not contagious*, though the cold that may lead to one can be.

## **Duration**

Middle ear infections often go away on their own within 2 or 3 days, even without any specific treatment. If your doctor decides to prescribe antibiotics, a 10-day course is usually recommended.

For kids 6 years of age and older with a mild to moderate infection, a shortened course of antibiotics (5 to 7 days) may be appropriate.

But even after antibiotic treatment for an episode of acute otitis media, fluid may remain in the middle ear for up to several months.

