

After the opening is made in the eardrum, you must take care to keep water out of the child's ear because it could start an infection. But otherwise the opening or the tube causes no trouble at all, and you will probably notice a remarkable improvement in the child's hearing and a welcome decrease in the frequency of ear infections.

Otitis media may recur from time to time as a result of chronically infected adenoids and tonsils. If this is found to be a recurring problem for your child, the doctor may recommend an operation to remove the tonsils, adenoids, or both, and this may be done at the same time he inserts the ventilating tubes into the eardrums.

Allergies may also require some treatment.

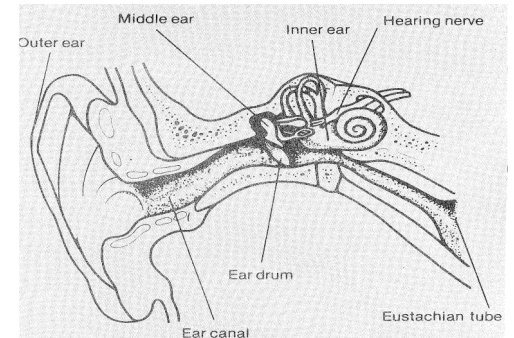
But Remember...

Otitis media is generally not serious if it is properly and promptly treated. With the help of your physician, you can help your child to feel and hear better very soon.

Be sure to follow the treatment plan and see your physician until he tells you the condition is fully cured.

*American Academy of Otolaryngology-
Head and Neck Surgery, Inc.*

EARACHE & OTTITIS MEDIA



Otitis media is the most frequent diagnosis recorded for children who visit physicians for illness. Otitis media is also the most common cause of hearing loss in children.

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What Is Otitis Media?

The best way to define *otitis media* is to look at what the words mean. They are actually made up of three parts: *ot-* meaning “ear” *-itis* meaning “inflammation”, and *media* meaning “middle”, or more exactly, “middle ear”. So, *otitis media* means “inflammation of the middle ear.” The inflammation occurs as a result of a middle ear infection. It can occur in both ears.

Although *otitis media* is most common in young children, it also affects adults occasionally. It occurs most commonly in the winter and early spring.

Is It Serious?

Yes it is serious because of the hearing loss it creates, and such hearing loss may impair the child’s learning capacity and even delay his speech development. It is also serious because it can cause severe earache and because infection can spread to nearby structures in the head, especially the mastoid.

However, *otitis media* is not serious if it is treated promptly and effectively, and the hearing can almost always be restored to normal. Thus, it is very important to recognize the symptoms of *otitis media* and to get medical attention from the start.

How Does the Middle Ear Function?

The middle ear is a pea-sized, air-filled cavity separated from the outer ear by the paper-thin eardrum. Attached to the eardrum are three tiny ear bones. When sound waves strike the eardrum, it vibrates and sets the bones into a motion that is transmitted to the inner ear, which generates nerve impulses that are sent to the brain.

A healthy middle ear must contain air at the same atmospheric pressure as outside of the ear, so all these structures can vibrate freely. Air enters the middle ear through a narrow tube called the eustachian tube, which passes from the back of the nose up to the ear. When you yawn or swallow and hear a pop (or click) in your ear, that means your eustachian tube has just sent a tiny little bubble of air up into your middle ear to equalize the air pressure. This happens automatically over 1,000 times a day.

What Are the Symptoms of Otitis Media ?

The most prominent symptom of acute *otitis media* is earache, associated with a feeling of pressure and blockage in the ear. Children who cannot describe earache may simply tug or rub the affected ear. Fever often accompanies the earache, especially in children.

What to Expect at the Doctor’s Examination

During your child’s examination, the doctor will look inside his ears, using an instrument called an otoscope. With the otoscope inserted in the ear, the doctor can check for redness and fluid behind the eardrum and see if the eardrum moves in response to air pressure. A mobile (vibrating) eardrum is normal.

In addition, two tests may be performed to give the doctor information that cannot be learned through observation alone. One of these tests is an audiogram, in which tones are sounded at various pitches. An audiogram is used to measure how much hearing loss has occurred. The second test, called a tympanogram, measures the air pressure in the middle ear; this indicates how well the eustachian tube is functioning. These two tests help the doctor determine the severity of the problem and decide on a course of treatment.

The Importance of Medication

The doctor may prescribe one or more medications for your child. One may be an antibiotic, which fights infection. Although the antibiotic may help the earache go away very rapidly, the infection itself may need more time to clear up. So be sure your child takes the antibiotic for the full time it is prescribed, usually 10-14 days. Always read the label on the prescription bottle and follow the instructions carefully.

The doctor may also prescribe an antihistamine or a decongestant or a combination of these medicines when a cold or an allergy or both are present.

The doctor may also recommend medication to relieve pain and to reduce fever. Sometimes analgesic (pain-relieving) ear drops are prescribed.

Call the doctor if you have any questions about any of your child’s medications or if symptoms do not clear up.

What Other Treatment May Be Necessary?

Most of the time, *otitis media* clears up with proper medication and home treatment. In many cases, however, further treatment may be recommended by your physician. For instance, an operation called a myringotomy may be recommended. This involves a small surgical incision into the eardrum to promote drainage of fluid and to relieve pain. The incision heals within a few days and creates practically no scarring or injury to the eardrum. In fact, the surgical opening often heals over before the infection has cleared and therefore fluid can reaccumulate. To overcome this problem, the doctor can place a tiny tube into the opening in the eardrum. This ventilating tube helps by equalizing air pressure and preventing accumulation of fluid in the middle ear. It improves the child’s hearing.