

Middle Ear Infection (Otitis Media)

Otitis media is an infection of the “middle ear.” The middle ear includes the eardrum and the small space behind it. Otitis media is very common in children. Symptoms include ear pain, fever, trouble hearing or sleeping. Your child may also look more restless than usual.

What is the treatment?

Fortunately, otitis media usually clears on its own in 2 to 3 days.

Otitis media does not usually require an antibiotic.

Your physician will advise you to observe your child closely for the next 2 to 3 days. During this time, your child’s symptoms should improve gradually. This “watchful waiting” approach is safe, and it avoids unnecessary use of antibiotics for your child.

For pain and fever, you can give over-the-counter medications such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®, Tempra®) or ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®). Talk to your physician or pharmacist for dosing information. **Do not give aspirin or ASA** because of the risk of developing a rare but very serious condition called Reye syndrome.

Occasionally, an antibiotic may be prescribed. In that case, give it exactly as directed by your physician or pharmacist.

Other medications such as decongestants, antihistamines and steroids do not help dry up the fluid in the ear.

When should I contact my physician?

Contact/return to your physician if:

- symptoms get worse at any time
- your child is not better in 2 to 3 days
- your child has severe pain and discomfort not relieved by pain medication

It is common for fluid to remain in the middle ear after the infection clears. This may cause dulled hearing for a few weeks to months. See your physician if hearing has not improved after 3 months.

