

# Ear Pain

## Call

### Call the doctor if your child has:

- Ear pain lasting longer than 12 hours.
- A stiff neck or fever. (See Fever section)
- A severe headache with worsening pain behind the ear.
- Swelling around the ear.
- Severe dizziness.
- Hearing loss.
- Liquid or blood coming out of the ear.

### Middle Ear Infections:

When people think of ear infections, they usually think of infections in the middle ear, an air-filled space behind the eardrum. This type of ear infection is most common in children 6 to 18 months old. Many children will have at least one middle ear infection before they are 6 years old.

Younger children will not always be able to tell you they have ear pain. You should look for other behaviors in these children that may suggest they are having ear pain.

### Suspect a middle ear infection if your child:

- Has severe or persistent ear pain (lasting longer than 12 hours).
- Pulls or rubs at her ear.
- Is acting cranky (screaming and crying), especially during feedings, and doesn't want to play.
- Is vomiting (throwing up).
- Has a fever.
- Has difficulty sleeping.
- Does not hear as well as before.
- Has fluid or blood leaking out of the ear.

### Outer Ear Infections:

Outer ear infections (also called external ear infections or "swimmer's ear") are less common than middle ear infections but can occur at any age. This type of ear infection is an infection of the ear canal.

Children are more likely to get outer ear infections if they:

- Swim.
- Use headphones or hearing aids.

Suspect an outer ear infection if your child:

- Complains of ear pain that doesn't go away.
- Has worse pain when you pull on the ear or ear lobe.
- Has redness on the outer ear.

You should call your child's doctor if you think he or she has an outer ear infection. Your doctor can prescribe eardrops to help your child.

### The Facts:

Earaches are common problems in children. The pain is caused by fluid in the ear or an infection. Many children have ear pain when they get a cold or allergies, but the earache goes away on its own. Ear pain does not always indicate an infection, so your child does not always need antibiotics.

### What else can I do for ear pain?

- Give acetaminophen or ibuprofen.
- Follow the doctor's directions. Keep follow-up appointments, even if your child is feeling better.
- If the doctor gives your child antibiotics, give ALL of the medicine as instructed, even if your child looks better.
- Put a warm washcloth or water bottle over outside of ear to dull the pain.