



Ear infection

You or your child came to the emergency department with ear pain. The doctor looked in the ear and thinks there is an infection. It does not need hospital care. This sheet explains how to manage it at home.

What is it?

A middle ear infection happens behind the eardrum, often after a cold. It causes ear pain, fever, and sometimes mild hearing loss. Young children may pull at the ear or be unsettled. Most ear infections get better by themselves within 3 days, so antibiotics are often not needed. Sometimes the eardrum bursts and fluid leaks out; this usually heals on its own.

Looking after yourself at home

- Rest and drink plenty of fluids.
- A warm cloth held against the ear may ease the pain.
- Do not put cotton buds, oils or drops in the ear unless a doctor told you to.
- If fluid is leaking, gently wipe the outside of the ear only. Keep the ear dry when washing.
- Keep children away from cigarette smoke; it makes ear infections more likely.

Medicines

- Paracetamol or ibuprofen can ease pain and fever, unless your doctor told you not to. Use the correct dose for age from the packet.
- Avoid ibuprofen if you have a stomach ulcer, kidney disease, some asthma, or are pregnant.
- If antibiotics were prescribed, or you were told to start them only if not better, follow those instructions and finish the course.

Follow-up

- See your family doctor or health centre if not improving after 3 days.
- See them if fluid keeps leaking from the ear for more than a week.
- See them if hearing still seems reduced after 2 to 3 weeks.

Come back to the emergency department or call an ambulance straight away if:

- Swelling, redness or pain behind the ear, or the ear is pushed forward
- A stiff neck, a severe headache, or dislike of bright light
- Very drowsy, hard to wake, confused, or floppy
- A new weakness or droop on one side of the face
- A high fever that will not come down, or a rash that does not fade when pressed
- Sudden dizziness or loss of balance with vomiting



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This leaflet is general information to support the advice your doctor or nurse gave you today. It does not replace their advice. If you are worried, seek medical help.

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