

# PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

## Prevention of Otitis Media

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#### WHAT IS OTITIS MEDIA?

Otitis media (commonly called an ear infection) is the most common reason children receive antibiotics. When your child gets seasonal allergies or a cold, fluid can build up behind the eardrum, causing pain and muffled hearing. This fluid can also get infected by bacteria, causing fever and chills.

The most common symptoms of otitis media are ear pain or pressure, trouble hearing, and fever. Symptoms in younger children can include pulling at ears, vomiting and general fussiness. These symptoms can last weeks or even months.

#### HOW IS OTITIS MEDIA TREATED?

If you notice your child experiencing these symptoms, take them to a doctor to have their ears checked. After talking to you and your child, the doctor may use an otoscope—a light used to see inside the ear—to examine your child's eardrum. They may tell you that the eardrum is “bulging,” indicating that there may be fluid pressing on it.

Since ear infections can go away on their own, your doctor may wait a few days before giving your child antibiotics. However, if your child is younger than 2 years old, or if they're very sick, your doctor may start antibiotics right away. Symptoms usually resolve in about 1 week.

#### HOW CAN I KEEP MY CHILD FROM GETTING OTITIS MEDIA?

If your child gets ear infections frequently, you can talk to the doctor about certain steps you can take to help your child stay well. These include:

- Keeping your child up to date on vaccines, including their yearly flu shot
- Ensuring your child is not exposed to secondhand smoke
- Giving your child a daily antihistamine or daily antibiotic during the season in which they experience allergies or colds
- Having your child undergo surgery to place a small temporary tube—called a tympanostomy tube—in their ear, which prevents fluid from collecting in the ear

**SOURCE:** Pelton SI. Acute otitis media in children: treatment. Uptodate.com. Updated January 15, 2019. <https://www.uptodate.com/contents/acute-otitis-media-in-children-treatment>

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