

# Otitis Media

The most common type of ear infection

## What is it?

The ear is made up of three parts: outer, middle, and inner. The *outer ear* is the part that you can see. The *middle ear* is responsible for hearing. The *inner ear* is responsible for balance. When the *middle ear* gets infected, this is called otitis media.



### Who gets otitis media?

Otitis media is most common in children, but it can also occur in adults.

### What causes otitis media?

Otitis media can be caused by infection with a *virus*, *bacteria*, or *fungus*. Sometimes, throat infections (e.g. strep throat) can travel into the ear via the *Eustachian tube*, which connects the ear and throat.

## What will it do to me?

### Symptoms of otitis media

- Ear pain
- Fever
- Irritability
- Swollen lymph nodes in the neck
- A wet-feeling ear
- If there is also another infection (e.g. a cold), then symptoms may include cough, runny nose, and sore throat

### Otitis media with effusion

“Effusion” means a buildup of fluid. If pus builds up in the middle ear, behind the eardrum, this can interfere with your hearing.

### Complications of otitis media

Otitis media can cause a burst eardrum, leading to sudden temporary hearing loss. If otitis media is not treated, it can spread to the bones surrounding your ear. Untreated otitis media can also result in permanent damage to your hearing.

### When to go to the hospital

- If your fever is above 39°C
- If you have sudden hearing loss
- If there is blood, pus, or brown fluid draining from your ear

## What can I do?

### Preventing otitis media

Otitis media is not always preventable. However, there are things you can do to lower your risk. Don’t use Q-tips. The ear is naturally self-cleaning, and Q-tips will push bacteria further inside the ear. You can also use earplugs when swimming to prevent water from getting inside the ear.

### Symptom relief

Acetaminophen (Tylenol) or Ibuprofen (Advil) can be used both for pain relief and to bring down a fever.

### Antibiotics

As we noted earlier, otitis media can be caused by infection with a *virus* most commonly or *bacteria*. Viral infections always resolve on its own. Bacterial infection can be treated with antibiotics, such as Amoxicillin (Amoxil).

### Seeing a specialist

People that have very frequent or long-lasting ear infections may be referred to see an “ear, nose and throat” (ENT) specialist. This doctor can talk to you about further options, such as putting a small tube through the eardrum to allow better drainage of fluid.

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**Patient-doctor learning area:** Use this area to write down questions for your doctor or use it as a space for your doctor to answer your questions.



**Still have questions? Ask us @ [teachandlearnfm.com](https://teachandlearnfm.com)**