

Ear Pain

Ear pain in childhood is a common occurrence. When should parents be concerned?

- If your child is inconsolable and pain is not responding to Ibuprofen or Tylenol.
- Olive oil or mineral oil may help soothe ear pain.
- In general, ear infections are not an emergency. If ear pain occurs in the evening, treat the pain with Tylenol or Ibuprofen (>6 months old) and your child can be seen the next morning. Even with the start of antibiotics, it typically takes 2-3 days to see a big improvement in symptoms.

What are the different types of ear infections?

- **Inner Ear Infections:** Inner ear infections are secondary infections that typically develop while having an upper respiratory infection. Ear infections are not contagious. Different bacteria and viruses can cause an ear infection. Fluid from the nose travels up the eustachian tube into the middle ear space. If that fluid sits around for long enough, it can get secondarily infected by bacteria.
- **Inner Ear Infection with Rupture of the Ear Drum:** As infection develops, pressure is placed on the ear drum. If the ear drum is under enough pressure, a small hole can develop and the infected fluid will drain into the ear canal. As bad as a ruptured ear drum sounds, it actually improves the ear pain (since the ear drum is no longer under pressure) and typically heals in a short period of time.
- **Outer Ear Canal Infections (Swimmer's Ear):** Outer ear infections are usually seen in the summer months. Water can get trapped in the ear canal, breed bacteria and lead to an outer ear infection. Typically, children have ear pain without cold symptoms. It hurts to pull on the ear lobe.

How are ear infections treated?

- **Inner Ear Infections:**
 - *Children 0-2 years old-* If an infection is present, oral antibiotics are used to treat. The risk of complications (hearing loss, more serious infections) is higher in younger children, therefore, antibiotics are started.
 - *Children >2 years of age-* With uncomplicated ear infections, the recommendation is to hold on antibiotics and treat with pain medications such as Tylenol or Ibuprofen. The reason for this approach is older children will likely clear the ear infection as the cold clears. With more complicated ear infections (fevers, pain not responding to pain medications or ear pain >3 days), oral antibiotics are used.
- **Inner Ear Infection with Rupture of the Ear Drum:**
 - Oral antibiotics and antibiotic ear drops are typically used to treat the infection and help heal the ear drum. Your pediatrician will likely want to see your child back in the office to ensure that the ear drum has healed up.

When are ear tubes indicated?

- If a child has 4 infections in a 6 month period, 6 infections in a year or a persistent infection or fluid that will not clear, ear tubes may be indicated.