

Ear Infection (Otitis Media)

Infection of the middle ear is most common in kids 3 months to 3 years but can occur at any age. Ear infections many times are caused by blockage of the **eustachian** (“you-stay-shun) tube. The Eustachian tube connects the middle ear to the back of the nose. Normally this tube lets fluid drain out of the middle ear (the space behind the eardrum). The eustachian tube typically opens with swallowing, yawning and chewing. It is this tube that causes the “popping” that occurs in your ears when you fly or drive over a mountain pass. Pain occurs in the ear when pressure builds up behind the eardrum and the Eustachian tube can’t open to release the pressure. Many things can cause the Eustachian not to open well, including, infection, allergies, and colds. If the Eustachian tube does not open and close normally, fluid stays behind the eardrum and can become infected.

Symptoms of ear infections include:

- Ear pain and fever
- Feeling of fullness in the ear
- Decreased hearing
- Dizziness
- Discharge or leakage from the ear
- Pulling at ear (small children)
- Fussiness or irritability in small children

Risk of ear infections increase with:

- Recent illness, such as cold or sore throat
- Asthma, allergies or previous ear infections
- Daycare
- Winter and spring seasons
- Being bottle-fed while lying down (and possibly using a pacifier)
- Smoking in the household

Treatment for ear infections may include antibiotics if your doctor thinks the infection is caused by a bacteria. Antibiotics will not work for infections caused by viruses. Pain relievers such as Tylenol or ibuprofen (Advil). A warm (not hot) heating pad over the ear can also help with pain. If your child has a tendency towards recurrent infections, your doctor may talk with you about using either decongestants or anti-histamines when your child has a cold or allergy symptoms to help decrease secretions in the back of the nose. This will help the Eustachian tube to open and close more easily.

Ear infections typically improve in 2-3 days and are usually completely resolved by 2 weeks. If the infection continues to occur despite taking medication, then you may need to see a specialist.

Return to CostCare or contact your primary care provider if you develop increasing pain, increasing or new onset fever, decreased hearing, or drainage from the ear.



