

Ear Pain

Pain or discomfort in or around the ear. Your child may report an earache or a younger child acts like he did with previous ear infection (e.g., crying or fussy).

Causes

- Often due to an ear infection. Ear infections can be caused by viruses or bacteria. Usually, your child's doctor can tell the difference by looking at the eardrum. Ear infections peak at age 6 months to 2 years. The onset of ear infections peaks on day 3 of a cold
- An infection of the skin of the ear canal, often called "swimmer's ear"
- Reduced pressure in the middle ear from colds or allergies
- A sore throat
- Teething or sore gums
- Inflammation of the eardrum alone during a cold (without fluid buildup)

Ear Infection Symptoms

Your child may have many symptoms during an ear infection. Talk with your pediatrician about the best way to treat your child's symptoms.

- **Pain.** The most common symptom of an ear infection is pain. Older children can tell you that their ears hurt. Younger children may only seem irritable and cry. You may notice this more during feedings because sucking and swallowing may cause painful pressure changes in the middle ear.
- **Loss of appetite.** Your child may have less of an appetite because of the ear pain.
- **Trouble sleeping.** Your child may have trouble sleeping because of the ear pain.
- **Fever.** Your child may have a temperature ranging from 100°F (normal) to 104°F.
- **Ear drainage.** You might notice yellow or white fluid, possibly blood-tinged, draining from your child's ear. The fluid may have a foul odor and will look different from normal earwax (which is orange-yellow or reddish-brown). Pain and pressure often decrease after this drainage begins, but this doesn't always mean that the infection is going away. If this happens it's not an emergency, but your child will need to see your pediatrician.
- **Trouble hearing.** During and after an ear infection, your child may have trouble hearing for several weeks. This occurs because the fluid behind the eardrum gets in the



way of sound transmission. This is usually temporary and clears up after the fluid from the middle ear drains away.

IMPORTANT: Your doctor cannot diagnose an ear infection over the phone; your child's eardrum must be examined by your doctor to confirm fluid buildup and signs of inflammation.

Return to School

An earache or ear infection is not contagious. No need to miss any school or child care.

Adapted from the American Academy of Pediatrics at www.healthychildren.org

