

# Treating your child's middle ear infection



Contact your GP practice or contact NHS by dialling 111 in England (NHS 111) and Scotland (NHS 24) or 0845 4647 in Wales

## How long will the infection last?

The symptoms of middle ear infection or otitis media can last up to 8 days

## Antibiotics - the facts

- Most middle ear infections or otitis media often get better without antibiotics, as your child's body can usually fight these infections on its own
- Antibiotics are only likely to reduce the duration of your child's symptoms by LESS than 1 day
- Antibiotics are only likely to reduce symptom severity by LESS than 10%
- Out of 10 children taking antibiotics for middle ear infection, ONLY 1 would benefit from taking them
- If your child takes antibiotics, she or he is more likely to suffer from a number of side effects such as feeling sick, diarrhoea and rash and very occasionally severe allergic reactions
- The more we use antibiotics, the greater the chance that bacteria will become resistant to them. This means antibiotics no longer work on serious infections: this makes your child and your family at greater risk in the future.

## How to treat and ease your child's symptoms

- You can help your child fight the infection by making sure they get plenty of rest
- Give your child plenty to drink. This will help prevent dehydration
- Placing a warm flannel or washcloth over the affected ear may also help relieve pain until the condition passes
- Fever (having a temperature) is a sign your child's body is fighting the infection and usually gets better by itself in most cases. You can use paracetamol regularly in full doses if your child is uncomfortable as a result of fever. Ibuprofen may also be used (e.g. to help get to sleep) but avoid ibuprofen regularly as it may interfere with their body's ability to fight off the infection
- Ask your local pharmacist to recommend medicines to help your child's symptoms or pain (or both).

## When you should get help

1. Your child is drowsy or irritable
2. Your child has problems breathing - including rapid breathing and being short of breath or 'working hard' to breath
3. Your child has cold or discoloured hands or feet with a warm body
4. Your child has severe arm and/or leg pains (for no obvious reason)
5. Your child has unusual skin colour (pale, blue or dusky around lips)
6. Your child has high temperature (40C or higher)
7. Your infant is not feeding or your child is showing signs of dehydration
8. Your child has symptoms related to meningitis: unusually severe headache, a stiff neck (difficulty putting chin to chest), dislike of bright lights, a rash that does not fade with pressure
9. Your child develops severe pains or redness over the hard patch of bone directly behind the affected ear.

### Less serious signs that can usually wait until the next available GP appointment:

If your child's symptoms are not improving after 8 days.