

# Ear infections (otitis media) symptoms

**Acute otitis media is the most common ear infection.<sup>1</sup> Fluid is trapped behind the eardrum and parts of the middle ear are infected and swollen.<sup>1</sup> The term “acute” refers to a short and painful episode.**

The main symptoms of acute otitis media include:<sup>2</sup>

- earache
- a high temperature (fever) of 38°C (100.4°F) or above
- being sick, lack of energy
- slight deafness

Babies with ear infections will be hot and irritable. As babies are unable to communicate the source of their discomfort, it can be difficult to tell what is wrong with them. However, an ear infection is one possibility worth considering if your baby is unsettled in this way.

Other symptoms to look out for in younger children include:

- pulling, tugging or rubbing their ear
- irritability
- poor feeding
- restlessness at night
- coughing
- runny nose
- unresponsiveness to quiet sounds, or other signs of difficulty hearing, such as sitting too close to the television or being inattentive
- loss of balance

In rare cases of otitis media, the eardrum will become perforated (a hole will form in it), and pus may run out of the ear. Sometimes, this can help to relieve the pain by releasing the pressure on the eardrum, but it may also lead to re-infection.

## **Chronic otitis media<sup>2</sup>**

Ear infections that last for many months are known as chronic suppurative otitis media (CSOM). This condition is less common, affecting around 1 in 100 children and 1 in 50 adults. The most common symptom of CSOM is persistent and usually painless fluid or pus coming from the affected ear. Some degree of hearing loss in the affected ear is also common.

## **Otitis media with effusion<sup>1</sup>**

OME sometimes happens after an ear infection has run its course and fluid stays trapped behind the eardrum. A child with OME may have no symptoms, but a doctor will be able to see the fluid behind the eardrum with a special instrument.

The information provided reflects the current NHS Choices recommendations.<sup>2</sup> If you have any health concerns please consult your doctor, nurse or pharmacist for further information.

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### **Reference:**

1. NIDCD, Ear infections in children. [www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/hearing/pages/earinfections.aspx](http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/hearing/pages/earinfections.aspx) Accessed 13 February 2013.

2. NHS Choices, Otitis media, Symptoms. <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/otitis-media/pages/symptoms.aspx> Accessed 13 February 2013.

PREV0041 Date of preparation May 2013