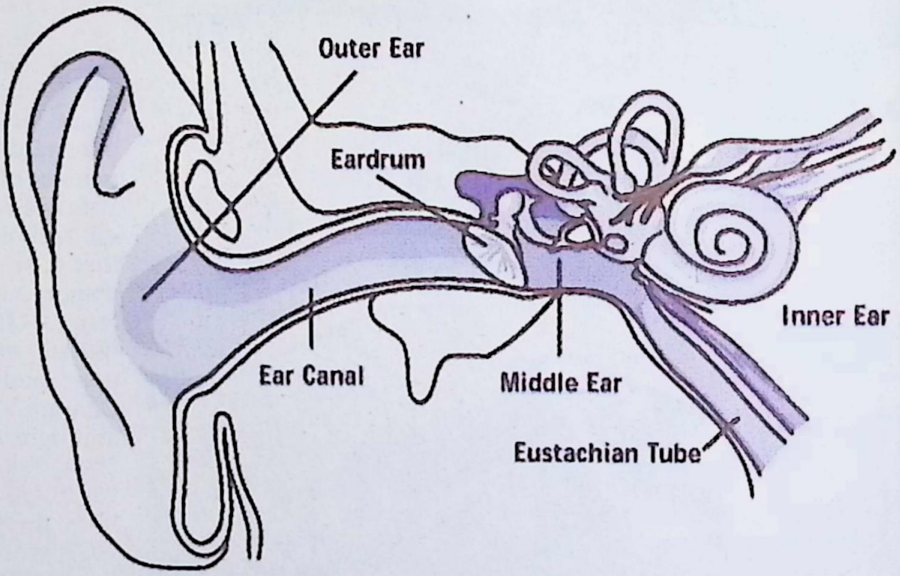
My Baby Has an Ear Infection!

What is otitis media?

Otitis media is an ear infection. Three out of four children experience otitis media by the time they are 3 years old. In fact, ear infections are the most common illnesses in babies and young children.



Are there different types of otitis media?

Yes. There are two main types. The first type is called acute otitis media (AOM). This means that parts of the ear are infected and swollen. It also means that fluid and mucus are trapped inside the ear. AOM can be painful.

The second type is called otitis media with effusion (fluid), or OME. This means fluid and mucus stay trapped in the ear after the infection is over. OME makes it harder for the ear to fight new infections. This fluid can also affect your child's hearing.

How does otitis media happen?

Otitis media usually happens when viruses and/or bacteria get inside the ear and cause an infection. It often happens as a result of another illness, such as a cold. If your child gets sick, it might affect his or her ears.

It is harder for children to fight illness than it is for adults, so children develop ear infections more often. Some researchers believe that other factors, such as being around cigarette smoke, can contribute to ear infections.

What's happening inside the ear when my child has an ear infection?

When the ears are infected the eustachian tubes become inflamed and swollen. The adenoids can also become infected.

The eustachian tubes are inside the ear. They keep air pressure stable in the ear. These tubes also help supply the ears with fresh air.

The adenoids are located near the eustachian tubes. Adenoids are clumps of cells that fight infections.

Swollen and inflamed eustachian tubes often get clogged with fluid and mucus from a cold. If the fluids plug the openings of the eustachian tubes, air and fluid get trapped inside the ear. These tubes are smaller and straighter in children than they are in adults. This makes it harder for fluid to drain out of the ear and is one reason that children get more ear infections than adults. The infections are usually painful.

Adenoids are located in the throat, near the eustachian tubes. Adenoids can become infected and swollen. They can also block the openings of the eustachian tubes, trapping air and fluid. Just like the eustachian tubes, the adenoids are different in children than in adults. In children, the adenoids are larger, so they can more easily block the opening of the eustachian tube.

Can otitis media affect my child's hearing?

Yes. An ear infection can cause temporary hearing problems. Temporary speech and language problems can happen, too. If left untreated, these problems can become more serious.

An ear infection affects important parts in the ear that help us hear. Sounds around us are collected by the outer