

Viruses cause many common infections. Antibiotics do not kill viruses only bacteria. Many infections caused by bacteria get better without an antibiotic.

We must not take antibiotics unnecessarily. This is because:

- Healthy people can fight off lots of infections caused by bacteria without the need for antibiotics. In fact we now know that many infections get better just as quickly without an antibiotic.
- If antibiotics are overused there is a risk of common bacteria becoming resistant. This means that antibiotics might not be as effective when they are really needed.
- Viruses cause most of the coughs and sore throats, cold and flu but antibiotics do not kill viruses.
- Antibiotics can have unpleasant side effects such as thrush, diarrhoea, rashes or feeling sick.

Some bacterial infections **do** need antibiotics but your doctor is skilled at checking you over to rule out serious infection.

MANAGING an EAR INFECTION

Ear infections are common in young children and less common in older children. Bacteria or viruses can cause them. Ear infections often follow colds when there is a lot of mucus around the nose and throat but they sometimes occur 'out of the blue'.

- Earache is a common symptom. This usually clears in a few days. *Remember sometimes pain felt in the ear is due to other causes such as teething problems. If your child has earache but is otherwise not ill, an ear infection is unlikely.*
- Reduced hearing may also occur. This should return to normal about a week or so after the ear infection has gone.
- Children may also have a high temperature, sometimes vomit and generally feel ill.

EAR INFECTION

(ACUTE OTITIS MEDIA)



M A N A G I N G A N E A R I N F E C T I O N

If the infection is mild, many doctors will no longer prescribe antibiotics immediately but advise a 'wait and see' approach. Some doctors may give you a prescription for antibiotics but ask you to **only** get it dispensed if the symptoms have not improved after a few days.

This is because:

- There is a good chance that the body's defence system will fight off the infection itself in about 3 days.
- We now know that antibiotics will do little to reduce the time for the pain to disappear.
- Antibiotics may actually cause unpleasant side effects such as diarrhoea and feeling sick or being sick.

However, antibiotics may be needed if an ear infection is severe or seems to be getting worse.



If you suspect your child has an ear infection:

- Give paracetamol or ibuprofen at regular intervals, according to the instructions on the packet, until the pain ceases. This medicine will also bring down their temperature.
- Give plenty of water or soft drinks.
- See your doctor if the symptoms have not improved after 2 or 3 days or they are causing you concern.

Consult your doctor if there are symptoms causing you concern or if there is:

- Repeated episodes, for example more than 4 times in six months
- Dulled hearing for longer than a month
- Sudden severe loss of hearing
- Sudden dizziness
- Severe Headache
- Neck stiffness
- Dislike of bright lights
- Rash that will not fade when pressed with a glass.