

Ear infections and tonsillitis

A baby's ears need to be treated with care

Ear infections, which can result in earache are common in babies and toddlers. They often follow a cold and can sometimes cause a temperature. A child may pull at their ear, but babies often cannot tell where their pain is coming from, so they just cry and seem generally uncomfortable.

Babies have some natural protection against infections in the first few weeks - this is boosted by breastfeeding. In babies and toddlers, bacteria pass from the nose to the ears more easily. Ear infections can be painful and your child may just need extra cuddles and painkillers from the pharmacist. Your child may have swollen glands in their neck - this is the body's way of fighting infection.

Earache can also be caused by tonsillitis (the inflammation of the tonsils). It is a common type of infection in children. Symptoms include a sore throat, earache, coughing and a high temperature. It is not a serious illness and you only need to see your GP if symptoms last longer than 4 days or become more serious with severe pain, a very high temperature, breathing difficulties or frequent vomiting.

Health visitor's tips

- A baby's ears need to be treated with care when cleaning.
- Never use a cotton bud inside your child's ear.
- If they have a temperature wax may ooze out.
- Use different, clean damp cotton wool on each ear to gently clean around the outer area.
- Avoid smoky environments.
- Only use ear drops or oil prescribed by a doctor.

GP says

The signs of an ear infection are a raised temperature, general irritability and pain or discomfort. The ears may be red and your baby may pull them because they are uncomfortable. They may even have a pus-like discharge, which can also be associated with a blocked feeling in the ear or hearing loss. Although most ear infections settle down without any serious effects, there can be mild hearing loss for a short time (two to three weeks).

If a child is not hearing six weeks after an infection your health visitor can arrange for a referral to an audiology service to assess your child's hearing.

1

My toddler has earache but seems otherwise well.

2

Have you tried infant paracetamol or ibuprofen from your pharmacist?

3

Most ear infections get better by themselves. Speak to a doctor if symptoms show no sign of improvement after 24 hours, your child seems in a lot of pain or you notice fluid coming from the ear.

Source: DoH Birth to five edition 2009/NHS Choices.