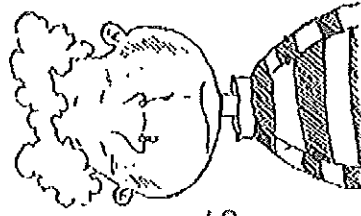


What is

Otitis media?

'Otitis media' is a medical term for middle ear disease. The middle ear is the area behind the eardrum. It is usually filled with air but when a child has otitis media, a watery or mucus-like fluid collects there.



There are two main types of otitis media

Acute otitis media or middle ear infection:

The fluid in the middle ear becomes infected and the eardrum becomes inflamed. This can be very painful and children may also become very feverish. In some cases, pressure from the build up of fluid can put a hole in the eardrum and fluid from the middle ear will run out into the ear canal.

Otitis media with effusion or glue ear:

A child has glue ear when fluid is present in the middle ear for a long time but it is not infected. There is usually no pain or fever, however glue ear can significantly reduce a child's hearing.

For more information about otitis media contact

- Your local Doctor
 - Your local Community Health Centre
- Community Health Centres offer a range of services that can help children with Otitis media. For information about audiometrists (who test children's hearing), speech therapists and, in some areas, Aboriginal health workers, contact:

NSW Health
73 Miller Street, North Sydney, 2059
Ph: 02 9391 9000

- Your local speech therapist
- If your child is displaying speech difficulties, then a speech therapist may be able to help.

Contact your local Community Health Centre or, for the name of a private speech therapist in your area, contact: Speech Pathology Australia
Ph: 02 9743 0013

- Your local natural therapist
- For the name of a natural therapist in your area, contact: Natural Therapy Associates
100 Walker Street, North Sydney, 2059
Ph: 02 9925 0119

I'm hearing you

This booklet, produced by Lady Gowrie Child Centre, Sydney, contains more detailed information about Otitis media.

Your child care service should have a copy, if not, contact Lady Gowrie (1800 351 989).



Otitis media

also called middle ear infection or glue ear



83% of children under three will experience Otitis media¹

OTITIS MEDIA CAN CAUSE HEARING LOSS

¹Otitis media fact sheet, published by Australian Hearing

This brochure was developed by Lady Gowrie Child Centre, Sydney and funded by the Commonwealth Department of Family & Community Services[©]

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Why do small children get otitis media

There are two main reasons why small children are more likely to get otitis media:

- Otitis media usually occurs when viruses and/or bacteria get inside the ear and cause infection. This can happen as the result of coughs and colds which small children often get.
- The eustachian tube connects the middle ear to the back of the nose and throat. It allows fluid to drain from the middle ear. In very young children, the eustachian tube is smaller and more horizontal than in older people, so the fluid in the ear cannot drain away easily. Also, when infection is present, the eustachian tube becomes inflamed and swollen and often gets clogged with the mucus from a cold.

Why do we need to be concerned about otitis media?

Otitis media affects the general health of small children. They lose their appetite and their immune system is affected, so they become less able to fight off illness. If left untreated, otitis media can lead to scarring, thickening and permanent rupture of the eardrum; sinus problems; and, in extreme cases, meningitis.

Otitis media can also cause temporary hearing loss. Three tiny bones in the middle ear (known as the ossicles) carry sound vibrations from the eardrum to the inner ear, and then the inner ear sends sound messages to the brain. If there is fluid in the middle ear, these three bones cannot vibrate normally.

If the otitis media is left untreated and the child's hearing loss continues, this can result in:

- learning difficulties
- speech and language problems
- difficulties with concentration
- introverted, irritable or temperamental behaviour
- confused social interactions

How do I know my child has otitis media

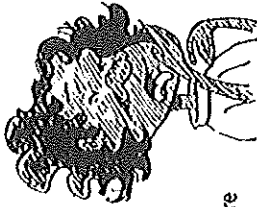
Earache and fever are the obvious signs, but even if a child has neither of these symptoms they may still have otitis media. Frequent colds, coughs, or a runny nose may mean a child has otitis media. Other physical signs are listlessness or a lack of energy when they wouldn't normally be tired, snoring or sleeping noisily.

If a child suffers from ongoing otitis media, their speech and language might become affected, or they may develop behaviour problems. Here are some signs to look for:

- Speech and language
- speech development is delayed
 - often does not respond when spoken to in a soft voice or when called from another room
 - often asks for things to be repeated
 - asks for the television or radio to be turned up louder than usual
 - shouts or whispers when you would expect them to speak in normal voice

Behaviour

- lacks concentration
- is easily distracted
- watches others for signs of what to do or how to act
- is disruptive or irritable
- wants to play alone even if there are other children present



If your child shows any of the signs of otitis media, visit a doctor. If your doctor decides your child has otitis media, they will prescribe an appropriate treatment. If your child attends a child care centre or preschool, it is very important to discuss this treatment with the staff so they can administer the treatment while your child is at the centre and let you know how your child is progressing.

Some simple ways to help children with otitis media

Nose blowing

Encourage your child to blow their nose as this helps to stop the nose and ear from filling up with fluid. Help them to become aware of a runny nose by getting them to look at themselves in a mirror.

You can help your child learn to blow their nose by getting them to follow these steps:

- Take a deep breath in.
- Close your mouth and hold your nose with a tissue.
- Block one nostril and blow out through the other one, not too soft and not too hard. Do the same on the other side.
- Throw the tissue in the bin.
- Get another tissue. Blow your nose again until it is clear.

Children should be encouraged to blow their nose when they wake in the morning. Tell them to blow their nose any time they sniff.

Blowing games

Blowing games and activities can also help develop nose blowing skills. These include blowing up balloons, blowing on windmills or wind chimes, blowing bubbles, and blowing or sucking through straws.

Physical exercise

Exercise like running, marching, skipping and hopping can help clear mucus from the nose and chest.

Encourage nose blowing before and after these activities.

Physical activities are especially useful if they involve:

- movement of the head
- effort
- balancing

Good nutrition

Nutrition is a key factor in children's health and may help prevent disease. Provide good food that includes a lot of fresh fruit and vegetables.