

OM – DP OTITIS MEDIA – DISEASE PROCESS  
OM – P OTITIS MEDIA – PREVENTION  
OM – LA OTITIS MEDIA – LIFESTYLE ADAPTATION

## **MIDDLE EAR INFECTION (OTITIS MEDIA)**

### **WHAT IS IT?**

It's a viral or bacterial infection which spreads into the middle ear through the Eustachian tube. This is usually caused by having an upper respiratory infection (a "cold") at the same time, but can also be caused by Eustachian tube blockage due to allergies. Middle ear infection is most common in children ages 3 months to 3 years, but can occur in children and adults of any age. Ear infections are not contagious although the "cold" that often goes with an ear infection can be spread to other people.

### **SYMPTOMS**

- Earache or a feeling of fullness in the ear
- Fever
- Fussiness (babies)
- Hearing loss
- Pulling at the ear (small children)

### **PREVENTION**

Breastfeeding decreases the chances of a child having ear infections.

Breast or bottle-feeding infants with the head up helps to prevent infection. Babies should never be given a bottle while lying flat.

Not smoking in the house or around infants/children helps to prevent infections.

Frequent hand washing helps to prevent the spread of infections.

### **TREATMENT**

Not all ear infections need treatment with antibiotics. Generally your doctor will prescribe antibiotics if the ear pain is severe with a high fever, and/or if the symptoms have lasted for two days or more. If antibiotics are prescribed, be sure to finish all of the medication. Acetaminophen (Tylenol) can be used for relief of pain and fever. The doctor may prescribe eardrops if there is an external ear infection as well (an infection of the ear canal). You or your child can return to work or school as soon as you are feeling better.

### **WHEN TO CALL OR RETURN TO CLINIC**

Whether or not you are given antibiotics, ear infections should improve within 2-3 days. If after 2 days, you or your child still have a fever over 102 F, severe pain, or drainage of pus, you should return to clinic. You should also call, or return to clinic, if your child has a severe earache for more than one hour despite pain medication, looks very sick to you, vomits continuously, cannot be kept awake, or complains of severe persistent headache.