



EAR INFECTIONS

Causes, Care, and Prevention

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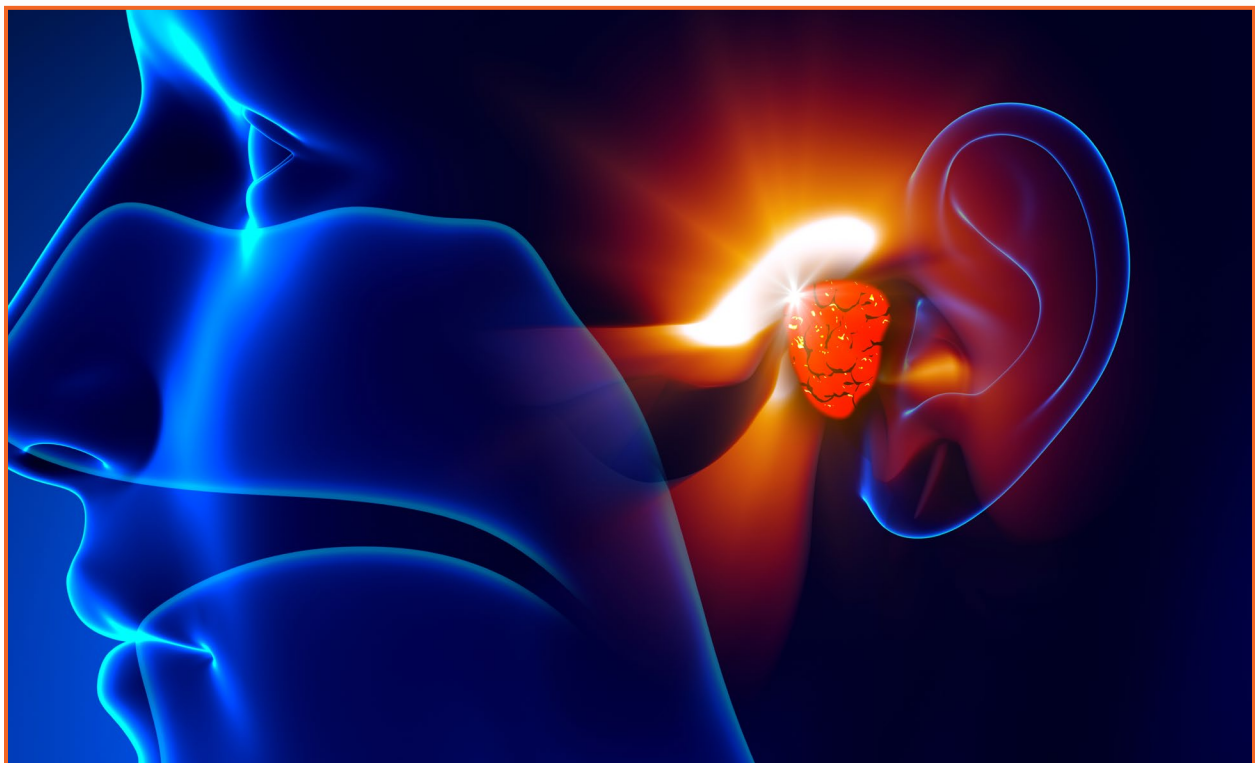
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INTRODUCTION

An ear infection can derail your day. It might come on sharply, out of nowhere, or it could be dull and constant. Maybe your hearing is affected, and the world sounds muffled. If it's your child suffering, they're likely pulling on their ear and may be more fussy or restless than usual. Their sleep and appetite might be impacted as well.

No matter the specific symptoms, ear infections are no fun for anybody, and, unfortunately, nearly everybody experiences one at some time or another. With a little knowledge, though, you can better understand why ear infections happen, what you can do when you — or a child — has one, and how to help prevent them in the future.



CAUSES OF AN EAR INFECTION

Ear infections most often occur in what's known as the middle ear, located behind the ear drum. Bacteria or viruses can reach this space when the Eustachian tubes — which extend from the middle ear to the back of the throat — become swollen or clogged. Here are a few of the most common situations that might cause this problem.

THE COMMON COLD

The most frequent cause of an ear infection is a cold, the flu, or another respiratory infection. This happens when germs from the nasal and sinus cavities travel through the Eustachian tubes and reach the middle ear.

ONE OF THE REASONS EAR INFECTIONS ARE SO COMMON IN CHILDREN *is that they're often exposed to many more cold and flu germs throughout the day.*



Whether in school or daycare, they're much more likely to come into contact with infectious bacteria or viruses through shared toys and books than someone who is at home or even in an office.

ALLERGIES

Adults and children with seasonal allergies may notice that they are more likely to get an ear infection when their allergies are worst. High amounts of pollen in the air can irritate the respiratory tract, causing buildup in the middle ear.

AIR POLLUTION

Poor air quality can lead to more ear infections due to how easily fine particles can become trapped in the body's airways, especially in children. Similarly, because of the damage it causes to the respiratory tract, smoking and secondhand smoke can also increase the likelihood of getting ear infections.

SWIMMING

You've likely heard of the term "swimmer's ear." Unlike the other causes mentioned above, swimming can cause an infection in the outer ear, which extends from the outside of the ear to the eardrum. This type of infection occurs when water remains in your ear after swimming — or even bathing — and creates an environment where bacteria can grow.



TREATING AN EAR INFECTION

The first step in treating an ear infection is to make sure it is in fact an ear infection that is the problem. If the symptoms last for more than a day, you should see a doctor to determine whether any more serious complication is involved. They'll take a look at the ear and talk to you about what's happening, as well as what your options are from among the following possibilities.

WAIT IT OUT

The majority of ear infections will go away on their own within one to two weeks, and symptoms will often improve much sooner than that — even within a couple of days. Waiting it out, though, can be miserable without something to manage the pain. Fortunately, there are a few options that can help.

PAIN RELIEVERS

Common pain medications like acetaminophen or ibuprofen can be used to alleviate the pain from ear infections. Be sure to follow the label's direction, particularly when giving medicine to children.

HEAT

A warm compress or heat pad, held against the side of the head and ear for twenty-minute intervals, may help reduce the pain. However, you'll need to be especially careful with children to ensure that the compress or pad is not too hot.



WRAPPING A HEAT PAD IN A TOWEL *is always a good idea to prevent any rashes or burns that could arise from direct contact.*

ANESTHETIC DROPS

Your doctor may also suggest ear drop medications that contain an anesthetic, like benzocaine, to help relieve pain in the middle ear.

ANTIBIOTICS

If an earache has been caused by bacteria, as opposed to a virus like the cold or flu, your doctor may prescribe an antibiotic. In this case, you'll need to be sure to continue taking the full course of the antibiotic even after the earache has gone, in order to prevent its coming back.



DRAINAGE PROCEDURE

In some more serious cases, your doctor may recommend a small surgical procedure. This involves creating a hole in the eardrum that will allow water, pus, or any other fluids to drain, relieving the pressure in the ear.

EAR DRYING DROPS

In the case of swimmer's ear, ear drops can be used to help dry out the ear canal, which will keep it from hosting bacteria. You can use a few drops from an over-the-counter medicine, or make your own at home using rubbing alcohol and white vinegar.

PREVENTING EAR INFECTIONS

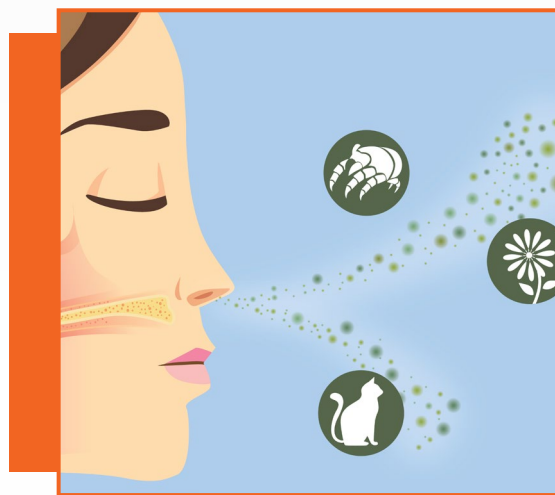
Though the above remedies will help cure an ear infection after you get one, it's even better if these painful nuisances can be prevented altogether. Having frequent ear infections can, over time, increase your risk for permanent damage or hearing loss, so let's take a look at some of the most effective steps you can take to reduce the risk of ear infections for you and your children.

PRACTICE GOOD HYGIENE

Since ear infections are often caused by common bacteria and viruses, frequent hand washing can go a long way towards reducing their occurrence. Children, also, should learn to avoid putting dirty objects near their face or mouth, and should also learn to cover their mouths with their arm or shoulder when they sneeze or cough.

QUIT SMOKING

By quitting smoking, you're taking the single biggest step towards improving the air quality in and around your home. You should also stick to smoke-free environments when out and about, particularly with children. This will reduce the risk of respiratory complications and their subsequent ear infections.



AVOID ALLERGENS. *Though some allergens are inescapable, others — like certain foods or pet fur — can be avoided. This will help reduce the risk of inflammation that could contribute to an ear infection.*

HOLD YOUR BABY UPRIGHT WHEN FEEDING

Feeding your baby while it's sitting up instead of lying down will lower the chances of fluid building up in its throat and causing an infection. For this reason, you also should not leave a bottle in a baby's bed at night. On a related

note, breastfeeding has been shown to reduce the incidence of ear infection relative to bottle-feeding.

CHECK IMMUNIZATIONS

Keeping a child up to date on their shots will reduce the likelihood of various illnesses that could lead to ear infections. Flu shots, too, for both you and your children can help lower the chance of an infection.



AVOID PUTTING OBJECTS IN EARS

While using a cotton swab to clean out your ears may seem like a good idea, it actually puts you at risk of damaging your ear canal or eardrum. To help keep them healthy, you should avoid sticking any objects in your ear.

KEEP EARS DRY

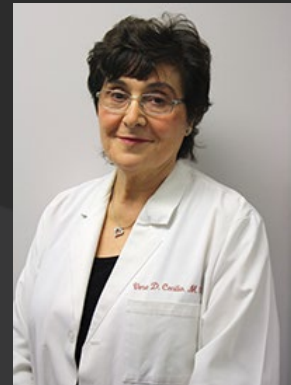
After swimming or bathing, use a towel to gently pat your child's ears dry. This will reduce the risk of water remaining in them and causing a case of swimmer's ear.

IN CONCLUSION

Ear infections may seem like an inevitable part of life, but there's a lot that can be done both to manage and prevent them. Ear, nose, and throat specialists—known as ENTs—can help. If you or a child is suffering from an ear infection, or frequently gets them, contact an ENT to discuss possible treatment options.

ABOUT C/V ENT SURGICAL GROUP

At C/V ENT Surgical Group, we take pleasure in providing unparalleled care to all our patients. Our team of ENT specialists and surgeons are highly skilled, experienced, and qualified to carry out various treatments and procedures to help patients with these conditions. Each of our physicians specializes in various aspects, including ear, nose and throat disorders, making them one of LA's finest specialists. Using our cutting-edge technology and equipment, we treat our patients with the expertise and compassion they deserve. Contact us today for a consultation with one of our ENT specialists.



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