

Adult Ear Infection

Otitis Media

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Adult ear infection (otitis media) develops in the middle ear, the area just behind your eardrum. It is not as common as childhood ear infection. Signs and symptoms include:

- earache
- fever
- red eardrum
- feeling of pressure in the ear
- muffled hearing.

It is important to get treatment for otitis media. Left untreated, it can lead to hearing loss and other problems.

How Otitis Media Develops

Otitis media often develops when any of several conditions causes your Eustachian tubes to become inflamed, preventing them from functioning properly. These conditions include:

- cold and other respiratory infections
- irritants such as tobacco smoke
- allergies.

Your Eustachian tubes connect the inside of your ears to the back of your nose and throat. They allow normal middle ear fluids to drain into your throat where they are swallowed.

They also balance air pressure between your middle ears and the outside. This allows your eardrums to function properly and produce good hearing.

When your Eustachian tubes are working properly, they open briefly when you swallow. This allows air pressure to equalize and ear fluids to drain.

Any bacteria (germs) that enter your ears should be flushed out by the natural drainage. When your Eustachian tubes are blocked, fluid builds up in your middle ears. This can trap bacteria and cause infection.

Diagnosing Otitis Media

To help determine if you have otitis media, your health care provider will ask you about noticeable symptoms. He or she may also use:

- an otoscope to determine decreased movement of your eardrums caused by fluid pressure
- a tympanometer, which measures reflected sound to reveal the amount of fluid in your middle ears
- a hearing test.

Treating Otitis Media

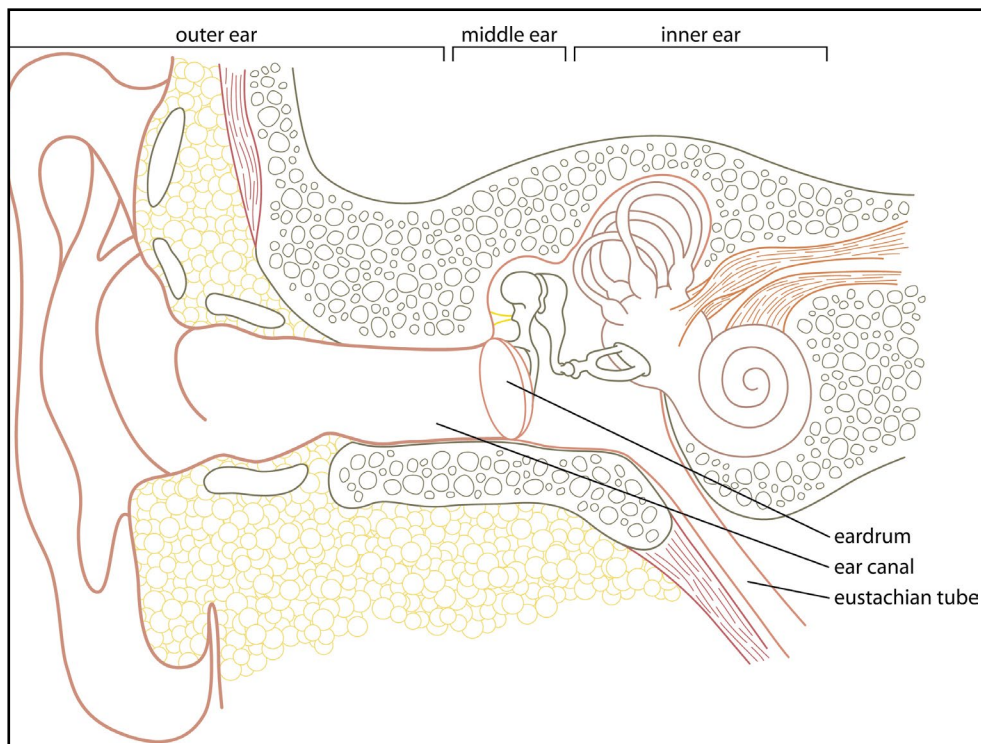
Since otitis media is a bacterial infection, your provider will likely prescribe an antibiotic. It is important that you take the antibiotic until it is finished, even if your symptoms disappear.

Unfortunately, many different bacteria can cause otitis media, and not all respond to the same treatment. Your provider may have to prescribe several different antibiotics before your infection clears up.

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Once your infection is gone, clear fluid in your ears may remain. This condition is called otitis media with effusion or serous otitis media. The fluid should drain naturally with time. If not, your provider may insert ear tubes to drain the fluid.

To help prevent getting otitis media, seek treatment for any upper respiratory infection before it causes ear infection.



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The parts of your middle ear.