



*I said “**otitis media**”, can you hear me?*

Maybe not, if your child suffers from frequent ear infections. “Otitis media” is the medical name for an ear infection. Otitis media is the most common illness in babies and young children.

There are actually two types of otitis media. The first type is called **“acute otitis media”** or **AOM** for short. **AOM** can be very painful to your child because parts of the ear are swollen and infected. In addition, **AOM** also causes fluid and mucus to be trapped inside the ear.

The second type of otitis media is called **“otitis media with effusion (fluid)”** or **OME** for short. This type means fluid and mucus have stayed trapped in the ear after the infection is over. **OME** makes it harder for the ear to fight new infections and because of the trapped fluid your child may also have difficulty hearing.

Unfortunately, otitis media is quite common and usually happens as a result of a cold or virus. When your child gets sick with a virus or bacteria, it can get inside the ear and cause an infection.

It is not always easy to tell if your child has an ear infection. Some of the signs to look for include pulling at the ears, crying more than usual, fluid draining from the ears, trouble sleeping, difficulty balancing, or trouble hearing.

If you think your child may have an ear infection it is important that you take your child to a doctor. The doctor will examine the ear to determine if your child does have an ear infection. He or she will then prescribe an antibiotic to work against the bacteria in your child’s ear. If your child is prescribed an antibiotic it is important that she complete the entire course of medicine, even though she may begin to feel better after a couple of doses. If you don’t use the entire antibiotic prescription, the ear infection may come right back.

If your child has a lot of ear infections it may cause temporary hearing problems. Hearing is affected because sound cannot get through an ear that is filled with fluid. This is especially important if your child is just developing language. If the language your child is hearing is muffled because of an ear infection her speech and language may be delayed.

If you and your doctor are concerned that your child’s hearing and speech are being affected because of ear infections, your doctor may suggest putting tubes in your child’s

ears. Putting tubes into a child's ear is a surgical procedure called a **myringotomy**. In a myringotomy, a surgeon makes a small opening in the ear drum and places a tube in the opening. The tube works by relieving pressure in the clogged ear so that the child can hear. After a few months, the tubes will fall out on their own.

If you still have questions about otitis media, remember you can always “ask the nurse”!

Otitis media, yes, I think you heard me.