



## Otitis Media (Ear Infection)

### What is it?

Acute otitis media or ear infection is a common childhood illness. Children may complain of earaches; babies may tug or pull on their ears. Sometimes they also have fever, a runny nose, cough, diarrhea or pus draining from the ear.

### What causes it?

It is important for your child to be seen by a health care provider if you think he has an ear infection. Ear infections can develop into more serious illnesses. Repeated infections can also lead to hearing loss.

### How is it treated?

- The health care provider may prescribe an antibiotic. It is very important that your child receive every dose of the medicine, even after he starts feeling better. There is a passageway between the throat and the ear behind the eardrum called the “Eustachian tube”. This passageway can be blocked by swelling of tissue lining the tube due to allergies or infections. Once blocked, fluid that would normally drain through the Eustachian tube into the throat builds up behind the eardrum. This fluid alone can cause pressure on the eardrum and decreased hearing on that side. Bacteria from the throat can grow in the fluid leading to the classic otitis media ear infection.
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol®, Tempra or other brands) can be given for pain and fever.
- Give your child plenty of extra liquids and allow him to eat whatever he feels like.
- If the child is under 1 year of age, do not allow him to take his bottle lying flat. Prop him in your arms. Children who take their bottle lying down may have more ear infections, as the fluid goes into the Eustachian tube.
- If the child is over 1 year of age and still takes a bottle, consider weaning as soon as he is feeling better.
- Do not smoke in your child’s presence or in the room where your child sleeps. Tobacco smoke may increase the number of ear infections and colds.
- Be certain to keep the child’s return appointment. His ears will be checked to see if the infection has cleared up.
- Chronic or repeated ear infections are treated by making an alternate passageway for the middle ear, mainly tubes in the eardrum.

For more information contact Guilford County Department of Public Health at 641-7777 or [www.guilfordhealth.org](http://www.guilfordhealth.org)