

# Frequent Ear Infections in Children

## Ear Tube Surgery is one Option

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Many young children will suffer from otitis media – an ear infection of the middle ear. While boys seem to be more susceptible to ear infections, children who attend childcare, have asthma or allergies, or are exposed to second-hand smoke may also have increased risk. Ear tube surgery—bilateral myringotomy and tubes, or BMT—is only one option for treating these types of infections.

### Signs and Symptoms

Relatively common among young children, middle ear infections are caused when fluid builds behind the eardrum and becomes infected with bacteria or viruses. Very frequently ear infections coincide with a cold or other respiratory infection. Pressure from infected fluid or pus will build behind the eardrum, causing pressure and pain in the ear, and may be accompanied by fever. Children too small to complain of pain may exhibit symptoms such as crying (different from normal cries), rubbing or pulling at ears, fussiness, inability to sleep, and trouble hearing or unresponsiveness to sounds.



### Diagnosis

Symptoms of middle ear infections are common to many other illnesses, so a thorough examination is important. Use of an otoscope, a lighted instrument, will allow your physician to look inside the ear canal for redness, bulging, and the eardrum's ability to vibrate freely. A physician should also check your child's head and neck for conditions that may make him susceptible to ear infections. An

Otolaryngology doctor (pronounced oh/toe/lair/in/goll/oh/gee) is a physician trained in the treatment of medical and surgical conditions involving the ears, nose, throat (ENT), head, and neck.

### Treatment Options

Most ear infections clear up within a few days and have no long term complications, although fluid may remain in ears for several more weeks. Infections caused by bacteria should respond well to antibiotic treatment. Viral infections will not respond to antibiotics and simply need time to heal, but your physician may have some suggestions for pain relief. Long-lasting or recurrent infections can cause damage to the eardrum and ear bones, leading to hearing loss. Children with frequent ear infections, hearing loss, or speech delay may be candidates for ear tube surgery.

### Ear Tube Surgery

During ear tube surgery, a tiny tube called a pressure equalization (PE) or tympanostomy tube, is inserted into the eardrum. The tube allows fluid to drain and provides ventilation to the middle ear,

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which improves your child's hearing and significantly reduces the likelihood of future ear infections. The procedure itself is done under general anesthesia, and takes about 10 to 15 minutes. Depending on the type of tubes, they will remain in the ear for 6 to 18 months, until they are pushed out as the eardrum heals. In some cases, surgery is required to remove the tubes, and some children may need tubes inserted more than once.

Middle ear infections are common among young children and can be difficult to prevent. If your child suffers from recurring infections, consult with his physician about treatment options and the possibility of ear tube surgery.

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**Otolaryngologists** are physicians trained in the treatment of medical and surgical conditions involving the ears, nose, throat (ENT), and related structures of the head and neck.



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