

# natural awakenings



## Natural & Alternative Treatments for Ear Infections

by Dr. Risa M. Sloves

“Why does my child keep getting ear infections?” is perhaps one of the most common questions a pediatric health care provider is bound to hear at the beginning of “cold and flu season”. Middle ear infections (known as otitis media) are the number-one reason parents bring their children to the doctor and, unfortunately, over the last decade, the number of children with earaches has risen sharply.

Approximately \$8 billion is spent annually on conventional medical treatments for OM including antibiotics, antihistamines, and surgical insertion of “ear tubes”. However, several studies have shown that for most children, drugs and surgery are not only ineffective, but these costly measures may actually predispose children to recurrences of OM. In fact, a study published by the Journal of the American Medical Association concluded that children who took amoxicillin (the pink, bubble-gum flavored and most commonly prescribed antibiotic for ear infections) for chronic ear infections were 2 to 6 times more likely to have a recurrence of their ear infection than those who received a sugar pill. And, ongoing studies at the University of Pittsburgh suggest that only about 1 out of 7 children with otitis media should receive a prescription for an antibiotic.

An earache develops when the tissue lining the middle ear or eustachian tube swells causing the opening

of the eustachian tube to become obstructed, thus preventing the middle ear from draining properly. As inflammation continues, the production of fluid increases and exerts pressure on the pain-sensitive structures of the middle ear. The obstruction that occurs may be due to physical or mechanical means. Swollen tonsils or adenoids which may be caused or aggravated by allergies are one of the most commonly encountered mechanical types of blockages. Biomechanical obstruction such as abnormal structure or function of the skull, the jaw, and especially the bones of the neck, can contribute to and often cause the development of ear infections.

These biomechanical problems often develop due to positioning problems in-utero, due to birth trauma, or following a prolonged or difficult labor and delivery, which may in turn result in swelling, muscle spasm, decreased circulation, decreased motion, and even misalignment of the spinal bones in the neck relative to one another (called a subluxation). Believe it or not, these effects can go undetected for months or years unless your child has a chiropractic check-up.

In fact, Gottfried Gutmann, MD, one of Europe's most prominent researchers in the field of physical medicine, has found that one of the most common consequences of these upper neck "subluxations" is an increased susceptibility to ear, nose and throat infections. These findings are so significant to the overall health of infants and children, that Dr. Guttman recommends that examination of the upper part of the neck be mandatory after every difficult birth, and with regard to recurrent infections "...the success of adjustment overshadows every other type of treatment, especially the pharmaceutical approach."

After sleepless nights and the pain of recurring ear infections, you may be trying to get your child off the antibiotic merry-go-round. The following are some helpful hints to dealing with ear infections:

1. Have your child checked for spinal subluxations by a Board Certified Pediatric Chiropractor. If subluxations are present, a gentle adjustment (often with only a fingertip) can be performed to correct this condition. Numerous studies have proven chiropractic care to be extremely beneficial in relieving the causes of ear infections and eliminating recurrent infections.

2. Children suffering from chronic ear infections often have allergies most commonly to dairy, wheat, eggs, chocolate, citrus, corn, soy, peanuts/nuts, shellfish, sugar, and yeast.

New, non-invasive diagnostic and treatment methods such as the BioSET Allergy Elimination Technique are very effective in permanently eliminating allergies without medication or injections.

3. Breastfeed if at all possible.

4. Avoid exposing your child to smoke.

5. Warmed mullein-garlic oil drops in the ear can help ease pain and inflammation. All remedies should be discussed with an alternative health care practitioner prior to use.

6. Lymphatic drainage massage for the neck and acupuncture may help decrease pain and increase fluid drainage from the middle ear and should be reviewed by your physician.

7. Avoid sugar (including fruit juice)-sugar slows down the white blood cells ability to function and fight off infection. Increase water consumption. Vitamin supplementation can be helpful in improving immune function, but discuss this with your health care provider.

8. A child who has been on antibiotics has experienced a change in the normal bacterial level of the intestine. It is critical to introduce a Probiotic such as Lactobacillus acidophilus or bifidus supplements to restore the normal environment.

These alternative treatments are currently being used successfully to care for children suffering from otitis media. It must be remembered that all children are individuals, and what works for one child may not work for another. Parents should work together with the children's pediatric physicians and other natural health care providers so that their collaborative efforts will bring about the most effective and least invasive solutions for the number one pediatric health problem in America.

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