

EARACHE

Earache is a common complaint of children. Middle ear infection is the most common cause of a painful ear in the pediatric age group, but is by no means the *only* cause.

Evaluation of earache will depend on the type and severity of symptoms present. An infant who is pulling at the ear but who has no fever, irritability, or difficulty sleeping usually does not have an ear infection and should only be observed at home for the present. Likewise, a child who appears to have muffled hearing or popping sounds in the ear with very mild discomfort and no other symptoms usually will have a congested ear, a temporary condition that can be treated by encouraging gum chewing and an oral decongestant.

More significant earache will usually, but not always, be painful. There may also be associated fever, irritability, and difficulty sleeping. This does not represent an emergency situation and we prefer that you not call us after hours unless there is some other complication present. We will want to evaluate your child in the office within the next 24 hours.

The pain of middle ear infection usually comes and goes. Episodes of pain can be managed with Tylenol in appropriate amounts (see the chart in the back of this booklet). A warm towel or heating pad applied directly to the ear may give quick relief. Warm oil drops (sweet oil or baby oil) can be put into the ear canal and kept in place with a small amount of cotton to help relieve pain unless the child has ear tubes in place or has discharge from the ear.