About Ear Infections

Ear infections are caused by a buildup of fluid in the Eustachian tube—a tube that drains fluid from the ears into the nasal passages. Ear infections are very common among young children, although they can occur in adults as well. It has been estimated that seven out of 10 children will have at least one ear infection by age three. A good portion of these children will have more than one ear infection. Ear infections occur in children most often, simply because children’s Eustachian tubes are shorter and less angled than are adult Eustachian tubes, making blockage more likely when inflammation occurs.

Contrary to common fear, ear infections don't normally cause permanent hearing loss. However, if ear infections aren’t treated conscientiously, it is possible for the infection to spread to the inner ear, where it can damage ear bones and the inner ear structure, causing permanent hearing damage.

With this in mind, it’s important to treat your child’s ear infection early and with a great deal of focus and determination. Doing so will better ensure a lifetime of proper hearing for you and/or your youngster.

Signs & Symptoms

Because ear infections often occur in young children, they may not always be able to communicate the situation clearly. Parents should be aware of nonverbal cues indicating that an infection is present. Increased irritability in your child, or pulling on the ear should clue parents in that an infection may be present.

Other symptoms include:

- Fever in an infant (younger than 3 months) greater than 100°F, or in an older child greater than 102°F
- Ear pain
- Increased crying in young children and infants
- Temporary hearing loss
- Sudden loss of appetite
- Preference for sleeping in an upright position
- Thick, yellow drainage from the ear, possibly including blood
When to Seek Care

If pain and discomfort lasts beyond two to three days, seek medical attention. Ear infections are commonly treated with antibiotics. Antibiotics usually clear up the infection within 10 days. After two to three days of taking the antibiotics, your child should begin to feel better. Even so, make sure that your child takes the antibiotics for the recommended amount of time to make sure the infection clears up properly.

Other signs that you should contact your healthcare provider include the following.

- If pain continues for more than two to three days after practicing self-care
- If your ear pain is severe, or getting worse
- See a doctor if your pain is accompanied by headaches, a stiff neck or back, fever, dementia, or irritability
- If the infection is present in an infant (younger than three months) with a fever of greater than 100°F or an older child with a fever of greater than 102°F
- If yellowish or bloody drainage is escaping from the ear
- If you notice redness or swelling behind the infected ear

Home Treatment

Most ear infections will run their course within a few days if self-care techniques are utilized. In fact, nearly 80 percent of ear infections clear up without any treatment at all. Use the following self-care techniques to address an ear infection properly.

- Apply heat to the ear using a heating pad or warm washcloth. Be sure the temperature is not too hot, and avoid this technique with very young children and infants.
- Employ an over-the-counter medication such as acetaminophen, or ibuprofen. Because of the risk of Reye's syndrome, DO NOT GIVE ASPIRIN TO CHILDREN!
- Drink eight, 8 oz. glasses of clear fluids daily.
- Avoid getting water in the infected ear.
- Try using eardrops with a local anesthetic. Eardrops should not be used if there is drainage from the ear.

Continued on the following page...
Ear Infections

Frequently Asked Questions

Take a look at the following frequently asked questions—they’ll help you further understand this condition, and better care for yourself and your family.

How common are ear infections?

Ear infections in children are actually quite common. In fact, 70 percent of children will have at least one middle ear infection by the age of three. A good percentage of these children will have recurrent ear infections. Next to the common cold, ear infections just may be the most common illness in children.

Why are children more prone to ear infections than adults?

Because they have shorter, narrower Eustachian tubes—the tubes that drain fluid from the inner ear. During an infection (like a common cold) the shorter, narrower Eustachian tubes in children can become inflamed and swell more easily, trapping fluid and allowing bacteria to flourish.

My child is experiencing recurrent ear infections. What are my options?

Speak with your healthcare provider. Typically, antibiotics and time will heal ear infections, however, if ear infections become chronic, they can be dangerous and may lead to hearing loss and delayed speech development. In some cases, your doctor may recommend preventive antibiotic therapy or ear tubes to counteract this possibility.

Do children outgrow ear infections?

For the most part, yes. As a child grows and develops, Eustachian tubes become wider and more angled, and therefore function better. Ear infections are still possible in older children and adults, but are much less common.

Prevention

Ear infections, especially in younger children, are very hard, if not impossible to prevent. There are, however, a number of steps you can take to make them less likely. Practice the following tips to minimize your child’s risk of an ear infection.

- Limit exposure to other children who have colds. Daycare centers can be breeding grounds for ear infections. Try a smaller daycare or keep your child at home if possible.
- Breast-feed your baby. Infants who are breast-fed have lower incidence of ear infections.

“\textit{It has been estimated that seven out of 10 children will have at least one ear infection by age three.}”
Use care when bottle-feeding. Feeding infants while they’re in an upright position can help to prevent ear infections.

Wash hands frequently. Ear infections are usually the result of other infections like a cold or the flu. Keeping your hands clean can reduce your child’s chances of coming down with an ear infection.

Avoid cigarette smoke. Ear infections are more common in children who are exposed to cigarette smoke.

Keep current on childhood immunizations. There is no specific immunization for ear infections; however, common immunizations may make your child more resistant to illnesses that may lead to later ear infections.

Be careful when using a pacifier. Babies who continue to use their pacifiers after 12 months of age are more likely to develop ear infections.

Ear Tubes: Are they right for your child?

For children with severe and persistent ear infections, your healthcare provider may recommend ear tubes. Ear tubes are small, plastic tubes, strategically placed through the eardrum while a child is under general anesthetic. These tubes help ear infections by allowing air to enter the middle ear and by providing better drainage from the middle ear into the ear canal.

There are pros and cons to having ear tubes placed. Ultimately, the decision is up to you and your healthcare provider as to what will be best for your child.

Ear Tube Pros:

- Air can more easily enter the middle ear helping to clear the infection.
- Drainage is improved helping to clear and prevent infections.
- Pressure and pain of ear infections can be decreased.
- Hearing can be restored to some degree.
- Tubes can help to prevent future ear infections.

Ear Tube Cons:

- Child must be “put under” during the surgery.
- Tubes can be a hassle—while tubes are in place, water should not enter the ear (your child may have difficulty swimming, showering, etc.).
- The procedure might be frightening for your child.
- There is a small chance of scarring or a permanent perforation in the eardrum.

“Never stick anything deep into the ear canal as it can damage the ear drum and may cause hearing loss.”
Respiratory Conditions

About Respiratory Conditions

Allergies, bronchitis, and pneumonia are respiratory conditions that affect millions of Americans each year. In this section we'll learn about allergies, bronchitis, and pneumonia, learning when to employ self-care techniques, and when to contact a healthcare provider.

Allergies—an overreaction of the immune system to a normally harmless substance in the environment (called an allergen).

Bronchitis—an inflammation of the bronchial tubes leading to the lungs. Oftentimes, bronchitis appears within three to four days after an upper respiratory infection like a cold or the flu.

Pneumonia—an infection or inflammation that affects the bronchial tubes leading into the lungs. Pneumonia is typically the result of a bacterial infection; however, viruses and parasites can also cause this condition. Pneumonia sometimes follows a viral respiratory infection such as a cold or bronchitis.

Signs & Symptoms

Each of these conditions—allergies, bronchitis, and pneumonia—have similar symptoms, yet there are some important differences. Take a look at the symptoms for each condition outlined here to determine what you may be suffering from, and what you can do to find relief.

Allergies

✓ Itchy, watery eyes
✓ Nasal congestion
✓ Frequent sneezing
✓ A rash on the skin in the affected area

Bronchitis

✓ A dry cough that may later produce phlegm
✓ Mild fever
✓ Tiredness
✓ Tightness in the chest
✓ Difficulty breathing and/or wheezing

Pneumonia

✓ A cough producing yellow, green, or bloody sputum
✓ Moderate to intense fever accompanied by chills
✓ Rapid, shallow, or troubled breathing
✓ Rapid heart beat
✓ Pain in the chest when coughing
✓ Tiredness
When to Seek Care

Though most respiratory conditions are typically mild, they can become very serious, requiring the assistance of a healthcare professional. If you have any of the following symptoms, you should seek medical care immediately.

Allergies

If you have signs of anaphylactic shock, see a doctor immediately. Symptoms include hives all over the body, shortness of breath, tightness in the chest and/or throat, or swelling of the tongue or face.

If you become disoriented

If you become lightheaded or dizzy

If you develop diarrhea

If you are vomiting

Bronchitis

If chest pain is crushing or feels like a heavy weight on your chest (symptoms of a possible heart attack)

If your cough is accompanied by tightness in the chest or wheezing, or if your cough brings up green, yellow, or bloody sputum from the lungs for more than two days

If you are vomiting to the point of feeling faint

If you are having difficulty breathing or wheezing is increasing

If symptoms do not improve within 10 to 14 days

Pneumonia

If you suspect you have pneumonia, contact your healthcare provider right away. Treatment for pneumonia almost always involves the use of antibiotics

If chest pain is crushing or feels like a heavy weight on your chest (symptoms of a possible heart attack)

If there is a bluish hue in your lips or fingertips

If your cough is accompanied by tightness in the chest or wheezing, or if your cough brings up green, yellow, or bloody sputum from the lungs for more than two days

If you are vomiting to the point of feeling faint

Continued on the following page...
Respiratory Conditions

**Home Treatment**
Home treatment for most respiratory conditions is preferable as long as severe symptoms do not develop (see, “When to Seek Care” for a listing of severe symptoms). With proper care, it is possible to feel better within a week or two, except for cases of severe pneumonia, which may take several weeks to clear up.

**Allergies**
- **Try over-the-counter antihistamines** like Claritin or Tavist.
- **Use over-the-counter decongestants** like Sudafed or Neo-Synephrine.
- **Try breathing steam** to clear nasal congestion.
- **Use nonprescription nasal sprays, eye drops, and nose drops**—but not for more than three days.

**Bronchitis**
- **Humidify your environment** to help ease congestion.
- **Drink more fluids than usual**—at least eight 8 oz. glasses of fluid per day.
- **Try an over-the-counter cough medicine** for symptom relief.
- **Use an over-the-counter pain reliever** such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen. Adults may take aspirin (never give aspirin to a child!).

**Pneumonia**
- **If you suspect you have pneumonia, contact your healthcare provider right away.** Treatment for pneumonia almost always involves the use of antibiotics.
- **Drink eight, 8 oz. glasses of fluid per day** to help bring mucus out of your lungs.
- **Use an over-the-counter pain reliever** such as aspirin, ibuprofen, or acetaminophen to reduce fever and alleviate the accompanying body aches (never give aspirin to a child!).
- **Try a nonprescription decongestant** to help soothe a cough.
- **Try breathing steam** to clear nasal congestion.

“If you suspect you have pneumonia, contact your healthcare provider right away—you may benefit from antibiotics.”
Frequently Asked Questions

Take a look at the following frequently asked questions—they'll help you further understand this condition, and better care for yourself and your family.

Q I’ve heard that as I age, risk of serious complications from pneumonia increase. What can I do to reduce my risk?

You can get the pneumococcal vaccine. This vaccine is recommended for those ages 65 or older, or those who have chronic health conditions such as asthma. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children under two years of age also receive the pneumococcal vaccine.

Q Does smoking cause bronchitis?

According to the American Lung Association, smoking is by far the most common cause of chronic bronchitis. Smoking also causes heart disease, cancer, and emphysema. There’s only one right thing to do when it comes to smoking—quit!

Q How can I tell the difference between a common cold and allergies?

Allergies and colds can often produce the same kinds of symptoms—runny nose, sneezing, congestion, etc. The main difference between the two is that an allergic reaction will most likely produce all symptoms at the same time. A cold, on the other hand, generally produces these symptoms in succession. Another way to distinguish allergies from a cold is to look at duration—colds typically last one week, whereas allergies will remain as long as the allergen is present.

Prevention

There are many things you can do reduce your chances of developing bronchitis or pneumonia, or to avoid allergic reactions. Take a look at some of the tips below.

Allergies

- Know your allergy triggers—like pet dander, pollen, or latex for example—and, if possible, avoid them.
- Keep your house and car windows closed.
- Don’t smoke.
- Try using a HEPA filter on your air conditioner or air purifier (HEPA filters can reduce impurities in the air).

Bronchitis and Pneumonia

- Get a pneumococcal vaccination, especially if you are over the age of 65 or if you have a chronic condition such as asthma.
- Get a flu shot. Bronchitis and pneumonia can develop on the heels of a cold or the flu.
- Stop smoking. Smoking is by far the most common cause of chronic bronchitis.
- Get plenty of rest and increase your level of physical activity. Taking care of yourself can help to keep your immune system strong.

“Cigarette smoking is by far the most common cause of chronic bronchitis.”
About Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs)

Just as its name suggests, a urinary tract infection (UTI) is an infection of the urinary tract, which is comprised of the kidneys, the passageway between the kidneys and the bladder (ureter), the actual bladder, and a small tube that carries urine to the outside of your body (urethra). An infection of the urinary tract takes place most often when E. coli bacteria enter the urethra (the tube through which urine passes), and then enters your urine or bladder. The infection may then travel from the bladder to the ureter and finally to the kidneys.

Urinary tract infections are very common, and though not typically a serious medical condition, a UTI can be painful and uncomfortable. The following information can help you recognize, treat, and relieve the pain associated with a urinary tract infection.

An infection of the urinary tract takes place when bacteria from the digestive system adhere to the opening of the urethra and begin to multiply. The infection may then travel on to the bladder, the ureter, and finally to the kidneys.
### Signs & Symptoms

The symptoms of UTIs are easy to identify. Consider the following signs and symptoms and determine whether or not you may be suffering from a UTI.

- Pain or burning during urination
- Frequent urges to urinate in small amounts
- Inability to control urine release
- Discolored urine (usually red or pink)
- Pain in the lower abdomen
- Urine that looks cloudy
- Unusual smelling urine
- Lower back pain on one side of the body
- Nausea, vomiting, fever, and/or chills

### When to Seek Care

While most urinary tract infections can be treated easily at home, if symptoms persist or worsen, it’s important that you see your healthcare provider. Untreated urinary tract infections can spread to other parts of the body such as the kidneys, and cause serious complications. If you’re experiencing any of the following symptoms, see your healthcare provider right away.

- If your symptoms last longer than one or two days following self-care treatment
- If urination is extremely painful, and occurs with:
  - A fever of 101°F or greater
  - Blood in the urine
  - Discharge from the vagina or penis

### Home Treatment

With quick attention and proper care, a urinary tract infection can be easily and effectively treated in the comfort of your own home. However, if your symptoms last longer than one or two days after beginning self-care, you should see your healthcare provider for treatment.

The following self-care techniques will help you treat a urinary tract infection at home.

- **Drink plenty of fluids**—at least eight, 8 oz. glasses per day—especially in the first 24 hours. Forcing fluids can help to wash out bacteria causing the infection.
- **Check your temperature twice daily**—a fever can indicate a serious infection that needs medical attention.
- **Use a hot pad to soothe your genital area**—a warm bath may help, too (avoid harsh soaps and bubble baths).
- **Urinate as often as possible and make sure to completely empty your bladder each time**—don’t push too hard as it may cause injury.
- **Avoid intimate activity and don’t use a diaphragm**—until the infection clears.

### A Self-Care Essential

**A Juicy Question.** For years, cranberry juice has been consumed to treat and prevent urinary tract infections. And while the clinical evidence on the effectiveness of cranberry juice for treating UTIs remains mixed, the benefits of flushing your system with fluids to cleanse bacteria are well known. Make sure to drink plenty of fluids each day—cranberry juice or otherwise—when you have a UTI. The extra fluids will help cleanse your system.

- Nausea and vomiting
- Fever and chills

See a healthcare provider if you experience lower back pain on one side of the body (commonly referred to as flank pain)

- If you’re pregnant
- If you are unable to urinate despite a strong desire
- If your young child is experiencing the symptoms of a UTI—especially if it is a second occurrence

---

“A Juicy Question.

For years, cranberry juice has been consumed to treat and prevent urinary tract infections. And while the clinical evidence on the effectiveness of cranberry juice for treating UTIs remains mixed, the benefits of flushing your system with fluids to cleanse bacteria are well known. Make sure to drink plenty of fluids each day—cranberry juice or otherwise—when you have a UTI. The extra fluids will help cleanse your system.

**A Self-Care Essential**

**A Juicy Question.** For years, cranberry juice has been consumed to treat and prevent urinary tract infections. And while the clinical evidence on the effectiveness of cranberry juice for treating UTIs remains mixed, the benefits of flushing your system with fluids to cleanse bacteria are well known. Make sure to drink plenty of fluids each day—cranberry juice or otherwise—when you have a UTI. The extra fluids will help cleanse your system.

- Nausea and vomiting
- Fever and chills

See a healthcare provider if you experience lower back pain on one side of the body (commonly referred to as flank pain)

- If you’re pregnant
- If you are unable to urinate despite a strong desire
- If your young child is experiencing the symptoms of a UTI—especially if it is a second occurrence

---

Continued on the following page...
Urinary Tract Infections

Frequently Asked Questions

Take a look at the following frequently asked questions—they’ll help you further understand this condition, and better care for yourself and your family.

What causes urinary tract infections?
There are a lot of things that can cause a urinary tract infection. Bacteria from bowel movements can cause an infection if it makes its way into your urinary tract. For women, sexual intercourse can push bacteria into the bladder causing an infection. Those with diabetes may also be more susceptible to urinary tract infections because diabetes makes it harder for your body to fight off infection.

If I have to go to the doctor for a UTI, what will he or she do?
Because UTIs are so common, a trip to the doctor is really nothing to worry about. Your doctor will ask you to urinate into a cup, and the urine will be tested for the presence of an infection. If an infection is found, your doctor will most likely prescribe antibiotics to help clear up the infection.

I’ve heard that pregnant women are more likely to suffer from a urinary tract infection. Is this true?
Not necessarily. However, it may be more likely that the infection will travel to the kidneys in pregnant women. Doctors believe that the position of the urinary tract, along with hormonal changes that occur during pregnancy, make it easier for bacteria to travel through the ureters and into the kidneys.
Prevention

While UTIs are extremely common, they aren’t necessarily inevitable. There are some steps you can take to avoid getting a urinary tract infection. And while the verdict is still out on the effectiveness of these prevention efforts, many who have suffered swear by the tips below.

Prevention for Adults

If you’re a common sufferer give the following strategies a try:

- **Drink eight, 8 oz. glasses of fluid per day.**
- **Urinate at the first feeling of need**—do not wait until it’s more convenient to urinate.
- **Wear cotton underwear to keep dry** and loose clothing to allow skin to breathe.
- **If you use a diaphragm, keep it clean and checked regularly for proper fitting.**
- **Avoid intercourse until the infection clears.**

Prevention in Children

Your child’s well-being is always a concern, so it’s important to treat a UTI in children as early as possible, and also take steps to prevent them from occurring. The following steps can help prevent UTIs in children.

- **Don’t give your child bubble baths**—soapy solutions are perfect places for bacteria to thrive.
- **Be sure your child wears loose fitting clothing**—this includes underwear.
- **If you have a girl, make sure she wipes from front to back when using the bathroom.**
- **If you have an uncircumcised boy, make sure he knows how to wash his foreskin properly.**
- **Be sure that your child makes adequate trips to the bathroom.**

“Drinking at least eight, 8 oz. glasses of fluids daily can help flush the bacteria causing a UTI.”
About Eye & Vision Problems

Although vision problems can be uncomfortable and sometimes frightening, most are not serious. In fact, the three common vision problems discussed here—dry eyes, pink eye (conjunctivitis), and styes—are quite common and are usually not cause for alarm.

Signs & Symptoms

Dry Eyes

In addition to the natural drying of our eyes with age, allergies, smoke, dust, and some medications (sleeping aids, blood pressure pills, etc.) can cause dry eyes. Symptoms include:

✓ Eyes that feel hot and gritty when blinking
✓ Eyes that are irritated and slightly red
✓ Difficulty closing the eyelid

Pink Eye (Conjunctivitis)

Pink eye is an inflammation of the membrane (conjunctiva) that lines the eyelid and eyeball. Bacteria, viruses, and irritants in the air can cause pink eye. Symptoms include:

✓ One or both eyes become red and/or itchy
✓ Sensitivity to light
✓ Slightly blurred vision
✓ Eye discharge that may “crust over” as you sleep

Styes

A sty is a non-contagious infection of an eyelash follicle. Normally, styes fill with pus for about a week and then burst. Symptoms include:

✓ Itchy eyelid
✓ Red bump on the eye lid

When to Seek Care

There are some general eye symptoms that require immediate, emergency attention. Seek medical attention in the following situations.

Continued on the following page...

“See a doctor immediately if you experience sudden, partial, or total loss of vision.”
A Self-Care Essential

✓ **Picking the Right Pair of Sunglasses.** Are darker lenses in sunglasses more protective than lighter lenses? No. Tint has nothing to do with it. What you want to look for is adequate protection against both UVA and UVB light. Look for a sticker on your sunglasses that reads, “Z80.3.” These sunglasses meet various protection standards set by the American National Standards Institute.

---

General

- **If you experience sudden, partial, or total loss of vision.** Seek medical attention immediately in this case—minutes can mean the difference between healthy eyes and vision loss.

- **If you experience severely blurred vision and colored halos around bright objects (sign of sudden glaucoma).**

- **If you notice a veil-like filter covering your field of vision or you see flashes of light appear in one eye (sign of retinal detachment).**

---

Dry Eyes

- **If your condition persists despite self-care treatments.**

---

Pink Eye

- **See a doctor if there is pain in the eye(s), blurred vision, or a loss of vision.**

- **If you feel like there’s something in your eye.**

- **If yellow, green, or bloody discharge accompanies redness of the eye(s).**

- **If pupils are different sizes.**

- **If pink eye does not respond to self-care or if symptoms last longer than one week.**

---

Sty

- **If sty pain is severe or if a sty quickly increases in size.**

- **If the sty does not respond to self-care treatment within one week.**

- **If the sty seems to be affecting the entire eye or eyeball.**

---

Home Treatment

**Dry Eyes**

Try the following strategies to gain relief from dry eyes.

- **Blink your eyes as often as you can.**

- **Avoid eye irritants such as smoke or dust.**

- **Use over-the-counter eye drops** like Allergan or Aqua Site to help relieve dry eyes.

**Pink Eye**

If you experience any symptoms of pink eye, contact your healthcare provider. Your healthcare provider may test the secretions from your eye to determine whether the cause is viral or bacterial. Viral pink eye will usually clear up on its own, while bacterial pink eye will require an antibiotic eye drop or ointment.

**Sty**

Use the following self-care tips to treat a sty.

- **Apply a warm compress to the sty** four to five times daily for 10 minutes to ease pain.

- **Do not squeeze a sty,** or attempt to pop it. If it does burst, let it do so on its own.

- **If the sty bursts, rinse your eye thoroughly.**
Do you know how to care for...

Common Conditions?

• Ear Infections
• Respiratory Conditions
• Urinary Tract Infections
• Eye & Vision Problems

Take The Self-Care Quiz

The quiz below is designed to test your knowledge on the information presented in this section. Use this quiz as a tool to better understand how to care for yourself and others.

True False

1. Ear infections are most common among children.

2. Dark lenses in sunglasses are more protective.

3. Cigarette smoking is by far the most common cause of chronic bronchitis.

4. Urinary tract infections are very rare.

5. You should “pop” a sty as soon as you find it.

Answers can be found inside this section.