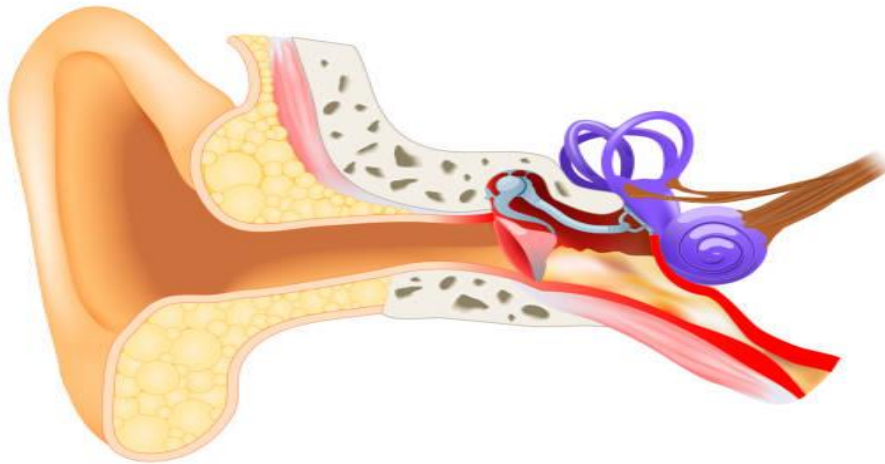

SELF-CARE INFORMATION ON OTITIS MEDIA (MIDDLE EAR INFECTION)

This leaflet is for patients with otitis media (infection of the middle ear). If you do not understand anything or have any other concerns, please speak to a nurse or GP.

OTITIS MEDIA



What is otitis media?

It is inflammation and infection of the middle ear. This is the eardrum and the small space behind the eardrum.

What causes otitis media?

Inflammation and blockage of the Eustachian tube following chest infection, colds, flu and throat infection which can cause a build-up of mucus in the middle ear.

What are the symptoms?

- *Earache*.
- *Dulled hearing* may develop for a few days.
- *Fever* (high temperature).
- *Discharge*- Sometimes the eardrum perforates (bursts). This lets out infected mucus, and the ear becomes runny for a few days. As the pain is due to a tense eardrum, if the eardrum bursts, the pain often settles. A perforated eardrum usually heals quickly after the infection clears. It is important that during the next 6 weeks that the ear canal is kept dry during the healing process. Once the infection (and perforation) has cleared, your hearing should return to normal.

What is the treatment for otitis media?

Most bouts of ear infection will clear on their own within 3-7 days. The immune system can usually clear bacteria or viruses causing ear infections.

- **Painkillers** such as Paracetamol or Ibuprofen will ease the pain and will also lower a raised temperature. It is important that you take painkillers as prescribed until the pain eases.
- **Antibiotics** are prescribed if the infection is severe with high fever and otorrhoea (discharge) or is getting worse after 3 days. (When an ear infection first develops a doctor may advise a 'wait and see' approach for 3 days to see if the infection clears without the need for antibiotics.) In children, 80% recover in around three days without antibiotics and complications are rare.

It is important that you follow the following advice:

- You are advised to prevent water from entering the ear canal during your treatment. You can prevent this when you have a shower by placing a piece of cotton wool coated in Vaseline in the outer ear.
- You are advised to continue using ear drops as directed by your doctor - it is important you wash your hands before and after instilling drops.
- If you are prescribed antibiotics, it is important you complete the whole course as directed by your doctor.
- It is important that you avoid cleaning the ear canal with cotton buds. Cotton buds can further damage the skin of the ear canal and will make things worse. They may scratch and irritate and push wax or dirt further into the ear. The ear cleans itself, and bits of wax will fall out now and then. Just clean the outside of the ear with a cloth when any discharge appears.
- You may be advised not to fly in aircraft, scuba dive or sky dive. Please seek advice about flying and swimming from your surgeon when you come to clinic.

Things to look out for:

- An increased, smelly discharge from your ear.
- Your ear becomes very tender and painful.
- You develop a temperature and feel unwell and feverish.

If you experience any of the above, you need to seek advice from a GP or 111 out of hours.

What are the common complications of ear infections?

Some mucus may remain behind the eardrum after the infection is over. This may cause dulled hearing for a few weeks. This usually clears and hearing then returns to normal.

Sometimes the mucus does not clear properly and 'glue ear' may develop. Hearing may then remain dulled. Please contact your GP if dull hearing persists. If the ear drum perforates it normally heals but rarely, the hole remains.

Useful contacts

- Ask your pharmacist
- Patient UK - www.patient.co.uk
- NHS Choices, www.nhs.uk/conditions/

If you have further questions:

Call the ***practice*** on *01285 653184* or *01285 653122*

If you require ***urgent*** medical advice, call *111 (24 Hrs)*

In an ***emergency*** call ***999***