



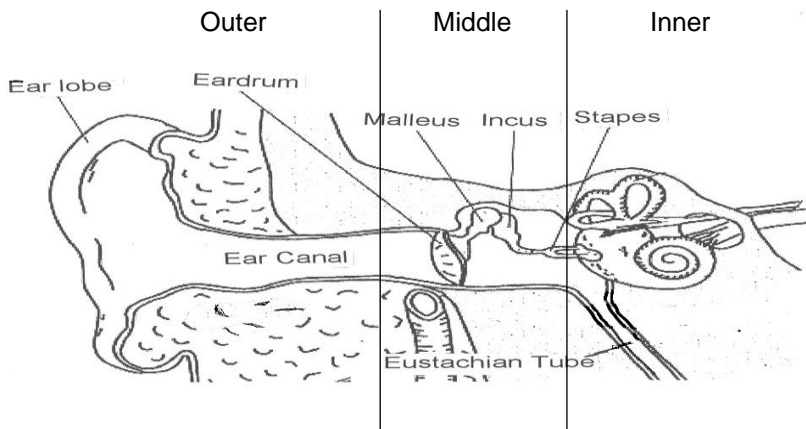
Infection of the Middle Ear (Otitis Media)

Your Questions Answered

Patient Information Leaflet

The ear is made up of 3 parts:

- The outer ear – from the earlobe inwards to the eardrum.
- The middle ear – the space just beyond the eardrum, which is filled with air and contains three tiny bones named the malleus, incus and stapes. These conduct sound from the outer ear to the inner ear.
- The inner ear – the section beyond the middle ear, containing nerve cells, which transmit sound to the brain. It also regulates balance.



The Middle ear is normally filled with air. It is connected to the back of the throat by a tiny channel called the eustachian tube. The tube opens during swallowing and yawning to allow air into the middle ear.

What is Otitis Media?

Otitis media means infection of the middle ear. Sometimes during a head cold, infection spreads up the eustachian tube to the middle ear. Fluid forms and may become infected. This is often associated with a runny or stuffy nose. Your temperature may be raised and you may feel generally unwell. Children and babies may be irritable and ill. Hearing is reduced.

How is Otitis Media Treated?

Your GP will examine the ear; the eardrum may be red and swollen. Painkillers are given until the pain eases. Although the immune system can usually clear bacteria or viruses causing ear infections, antibiotics may be prescribed if the infection is severe or is getting worse after 2-3 days.

You should have your ear checked by the doctor if the hearing does not return to normal within 3-4 weeks.

A hole in the Eardrum

Occasionally following infection of the middle ear the eardrum becomes perforated – a hole develops in it. This lets out infected mucous and often relieves the pain. The discharge usually lasts for a few days. A perforated eardrum usually heals quickly after the infection clears.

A perforation may also occur as a result of damage to the ear by attempts to clean it with cotton buds or hairclips, or following a blow to the ear.

Most perforations heal in a few days and hearing usually returns to normal. It is important not to use objects to clean the ear canals as they are self-cleaning. Ear syringing is not recommended following perforation of the eardrum.

Occasionally, the hole does not seal over.

What does the hole in the ear drum feel like?

The hearing is reduced. Because of the hole in the eardrum, the middle ear is more likely to become infected. This may lead to episodes of discharge (fluid leakage) from the ear.

How is the Hole in the eardrum treated?

It is important to keep water out of the ear to prevent infection. A piece of cotton wool, smeared with Vaseline should be placed at the entrance of the outer ear canal before showering or hair washing. Swimming is not recommended.

If the ear becomes painful or if there is a discharge of fluid, you need to visit your GP. The discharge is removed by mopping or you may be referred to the A&E where a vacuum is used to draw it out. Anti-biotic tablets or eardrops may be prescribed.

Eardrops should not be used for more than 7 days.

Surgery to repair the perforation may be considered depending on how often the infections occur, the amount of hearing loss, and how much the condition is affecting your quality of life. However, many people learn to manage their ear condition and live a full life without surgery.

We hope that this information is helpful to you. If anything is unclear, or you have any other questions you would like to ask, then please do ask the nurse/doctor.

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Revision History

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