

Do antibiotics help?

- If the earache is not caused by a bacterial infection you don't need antibiotics.
- Even if earache is caused by a bacterial infection, **6 out of 10 patients are better in 24 hours without antibiotics**, although symptoms may last **up to 4 days**.
- If you have to contact your medical practice for advice, your doctor or nurse will need to examine your ear before deciding with you whether an antibiotic or another treatment is needed.
- Everyone needs to use antibiotics wisely. Using them too much, or when they are not needed, encourages bacteria to become resistant. This means in the future the antibiotic may no longer be effective against the bacteria.
- Antibiotics themselves can also cause side effects such as diarrhoea, skin rashes and stomach upsets.

EARACHE?

Antibiotics are not the answer in most cases.

SO WHAT CAN YOU DO?

If you would like to find out more about self-treating common health problems ask your pharmacist, call the free healthline on 08085 202030 or email healthpoint@nhs.net

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**WHEN YOU'RE ILL,
KNOW WHO TO TURN TO.**



What might be the cause of earache?

Earache can have many causes such as wax, an object in the ear, or a throat, ear or tooth infection. Increased air pressure inside the ear can also cause this.

The good news is that sore ears do usually get better by themselves in about 4-5 days, and there's plenty you can do to help yourself.

What can you do?

- Take a painkiller such as paracetamol or ibuprofen regularly according to the dosage instructions. Ibuprofen may not be suitable for everyone – check with your pharmacist before starting.
- Do NOT try to get wax or any foreign object out with a cotton bud.
- If there is itchiness or pain just inside the ear you might have some irritation of the outer ear. Ask your pharmacist for advice.
- If you have water in your ear –just leave it to drain out on its own.
- If you have a discharge, with or without blood from the ear, contact your medical practice for advice.
- If you have continued symptoms (pain, fever, discharge, headache) contact your medical practice for advice.

What if your child has earache – what can you do?

Small children commonly develop earache when they have a cough or cold. This is because the tiny canal between their nose and ears becomes blocked with mucus. This can be distressing for the child, but does usually settle in a few days. Viral infections are a common cause and will not be helped by antibiotics.

- Give paracetamol, and follow the dosage instructions carefully – paracetamol is available as a liquid for younger children.
- Don't force your child to eat if he/she is ill and off their food. Give them extra drinks or ice lollies and runny food like yoghurt.
- Propping your child up with pillows, or raising the head of the bed or cot by 10 centimetres (4 inches) may help.
- Remember not to give aspirin to any child under 16 years.

How can your community pharmacy help?

- Your pharmacy team can advise on which over the counter medicines would be best to help you manage your symptoms.

- Your pharmacist can also check that any medication for your earache does not interact with any medication you have been prescribed by your doctor.

When should you contact your medical practice for yourself or your child?

Contact your medical practice if you or your child has:

- Severe pain that does not settle after taking painkillers for 12 hours
- Vomiting or becoming drowsy
- Runny yellow discharge from the ear
- An object stuck in the ear
- Pain in the area around the ear or if there are lumps behind the ear.

Please also contact your medical practice if your child is unwell, has a fever, is continually crying or is not feeding.

If there is pain in the tooth or jaw, this might be a sign of an abscess - contact your **dentist** for advice.

You should contact your medical practice urgently if you are concerned that you or your child may be seriously unwell.