

Information for Families

This information is for parents and families, to help them more easily identify possible signs of ear trouble in their children.

This Information Sheet is written in simple language, to appeal to a wide audience and for Education purposes only.

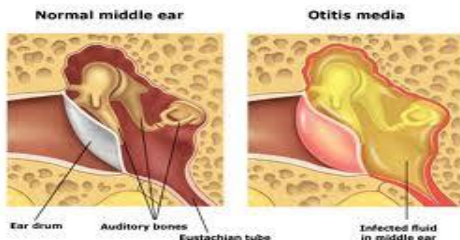
For more information see your doctor, or visit the links provided at the end of this Information Sheet.



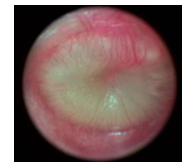
Ear Trouble can affect two parts of the Ear - **The Middle Ear (Otitis Media (OM) or Glue Ear)**
The Outer Ear (Otitis Externa or Tropical Ear)

What is it?

Otitis Media (OM) is inflammation of the middle ear where infected fluid builds up in the middle ear. This causes pain, bulging of the eardrum, and if the eardrum perforates pus drains into the ear canal.



Normal Eardrum



Bulging Inflamed Eardrum

OM is one of the most common troubles facing Australian children - 75% will have it under age five. It can rob your growing child on average of around 3 months of valuable learning time in their early years (0-5) and mostly occurs in the first 3 months of life.

Studies show that the rate is often ten times higher in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and can affect them for about half of their early learning years. Most of our important learning happens during these early years.

An aboriginal baby may have their first infection as early as 2 weeks old - if they can get help early it can stop them getting very sick.

How does it happen?

Infection begins to the middle ear when the breathing tube (Eustachian Tube) at the back of the nose gets blocked. The blocked tube stops the air from getting in and keeping it healthy. The fluid becomes thick and stale, and germs grow easily in this type of warm moist place.

Sometimes the infection will go away by itself, but the fluid will still be trapped, forming a "Glue".

The Doctor or Health Worker might call it **Glue Ear**. This can become a long term problem if you don't get help.

Otitis Media often goes unnoticed. Getting help early is the key to help reduce the terrible long term effects upon speech and language growth.

What can cause it?

Problems can begin with a cold or flu. Being around lots of other children can cause bacteria to be spread from one to another easily. Smoking around children can make their nose lining and Eustachian Tube become swollen, causing a blockage.

Why are smaller children more likely to get it?

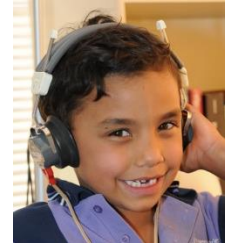
Most problems occur in children under 5 when the Eustachian tube is much shorter. This makes it easy for germs to spread into the middle ear. Premature babies are prone to middle ear problems.

How will I know if my child's ears are blocked?

You can't always tell — It's important to get their ears checked early and keep checking them until your Doctor says you can stop. Some Aboriginal children can have problems their whole life.

Sometimes children may have ...

- sore ears
- fever
- a runny nose
- wet ears
- go off their food



Children may not ...

- talk clearly - and be difficult to understand
- come when you call
- answer when you talk, or say "What?"
- hear family stories
- hear the teacher in the classroom

**If you can't hear –
You can't learn**

Children May ...

- be slow to talk - not say much
- point to things a lot
- sit close to music or TV
- act up at home or be in trouble at school
- look at others - copy what they do
- fall behind in class - not catch up
- stand back - not have confidence to join in

**Important:
See the doctor if there is**

- **Sore ears**
- **Fever**
- **Wet or runny ears**

Babies May ...

- seem hot
- tired - sleep a lot
- grizzly
- not drinking much
- pull at their ears
- be slow to walk, due to poor balance from blocked ears

Other things to know:

- 8 out of 10 Aboriginal children may have hearing loss at some time during the school year
- If English is their second language, things can be even more difficult for them to learn
- Hearing may fluctuate during the day – worse in the morning with fluid build-up overnight – better later in the day after running and exercise

Useful Information:

- www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/other-healthconditions/ear
- www.menzies.edu.au/page/Research/Indigenous_Health/Child_Health_and_development/Ears/
- www.det.wa.edu.au/aboriginaleducation/detcms/cms
- www.naccho.org.au/download/projects_activities/ear
- <http://www.hha.org.au/ForHealthcareWorkers/education.aspx>

See Information Sheet – My child has Ear Trouble - What can I do?

Author - Dee Parker - Courtesy of the Earbus Foundation of WA
www.earbus.org



Better Hearing Australia regularly updates our Information Sheets. To ensure this information is current or for information on our services please visit our website www.betterhearingaustralia.org.au for the contact details of your nearest BHA Branch.