

What's best for babies with recurring ear infections

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(HealthDay)—Infant ear infections can be a source of frustration for

parents and babies alike. But there are steps to lessen them and, when they do occur, "less is more" is a better way to treat them.

A typical infection can begin with [bacterial growth](#). Inflammation can lead to fluid buildup behind the eardrum. The eustachian tubes, which connect the middle ear to the back of the nose and throat, could become swollen.

Babies and children are more prone to these problems than adults because their still-developing immune systems have a harder time fighting off infections. And the size and position of ear passages make it easier for germs to reach the [middle ear](#) and for fluid to get trapped.

According to a 2016 study in the journal *Pediatrics*, breastfeeding and decreasing exposure to smoking help reduce ear infections. Also, try to protect baby from getting frequent colds—46 percent of infants had the common cold before their ear infection diagnosis.

Middle ear infections are the leading cause of doctor visits and prescriptions for antibiotics. But more doctors are now taking a wait-and-see approach for 2 to 3 days unless it's severe or baby is still an infant.

Many infections clear up on their own without antibiotics. Instead, your pediatrician might suggest over-the-counter pain medication to ease discomfort. Surgery to insert [ear tubes](#) to drain fluid is also becoming less common. The tubes themselves don't stop infections and the procedure could damage the eardrum.

Is it an ear infection? Know the signs:

- More crying than usual.
- Difficulty sleeping or hearing.

- Fever.
- Headache.
- Fluid from the ear.
- Excessive tugging on an ear.

To help limit the spread of germs, make sure kids know how to thoroughly wash their hands from an early age and keep them up to date on vaccines—vaccinated children get fewer ear infections.

More information: The American Academy of Pediatrics has detailed information on [ear infections](#), including how to help your child avoid them.

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