

# Advice sheet for patients with acute otitis media (middle ear infection)

The medical staff have decided it is safe for you/your child to go home.

## What is otitis media?

Acute otitis media is an infection of the middle ear (behind the ear drum). It is very common in children, but can occur in people of any age. The main symptoms are earache and feeling unwell, often with a high temperature. Sometimes the eardrum bursts (perforates) and releases the infected fluid, relieving the pain. Usually perforations are small and heal within a few weeks.

Ear infections are generally caused by viruses and get better quickly. Antibiotics are not advised in most cases because the infection usually clears within 1 week and antibiotics make no difference to the speed of this. Antibiotics may also cause side-effects such as diarrhoea or rash.

In some cases, we advise a short course of antibiotics. This is reserved for young children who are very unwell, patients with significant discharge from the ear, or children who have underlying serious medical conditions.

## What should I do now?

Offer regular doses of paracetamol or ibuprofen for pain. Please follow the guidance on the bottle for dosing.

A warm compress over the ear may reduce pain.

If you have been prescribed antibiotics, you should complete the course.

Decongestants and antihistamines are not helpful. They are not recommended.

If the eardrum has burst, you should keep it dry whilst showering/bathing until it has healed (usually in around 6 weeks). Do not swim until the eardrum has healed.

## You must seek further medical advice if the following happen in the next few days:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Symptoms not improving after 3 days</li><li>• Drooping of the face</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rapidly worsening symptoms</li><li>• Severe headache despite adequate pain relief</li></ul> |
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## For more information contact:

- Emergency Department 01535 294481
- NHS 111 111, or 111.nhs.uk
- Your GP
- The NHS website www.nhs.uk

This guidance is consistent with NICE guideline [NG91] Published date: March 2018

**More information is available on [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) – search for “ear infections”**

## Notes:

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## Are you a victim of Domestic Violence? For confidential advice, contact:

Bradford	0808 2800 999	<a href="https://www.stayingput.uk.net/contact">https://www.stayingput.uk.net/contact</a>
North Yorkshire	03000 110 110	<a href="https://www.idas.org.uk/">https://www.idas.org.uk/</a>
Lancashire	0300 323 0085	<a href="https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/your-health-and-wellbeing/domestic-abuse/">https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/your-health-and-wellbeing/domestic-abuse/</a>

If you require this leaflet in other languages or formats please telephone the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01535 294019

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[www.airedaletrust.nhs.uk](http://www.airedaletrust.nhs.uk)

