

Ivy Grove Surgery

Minor Illness Leaflet #2 – Earache

Dear

We have provided this leaflet following your recent consultation on . The NHS aims to empower all patients to self-care and we hope that this leaflet will help you to manage your condition in the future.

Name of condition

Earache. This leaflet explains three of the most common causes. There are many other causes of earache and we would always recommend that you speak to a doctor if you have any doubts or concerns.

1. Middle ear infection (otitis media)

What it is

Infection in the middle ear (also called otitis media) which is the part behind the eardrum made up of three small bones and a tube connecting to the back of the throat (eustachian tube). This is an extremely common cause of earache in children although it can also occur in adults. It often occurs following a common cold and usually gets better on its own.

Symptoms to expect

- Painful ear
- High temperature (fever)

Self-care

- Paracetamol and ibuprofen are usually all that is required

Normal duration

- Most children will feel better within 24 hours
- Most children will be back to their normal self after 3 days

When to seek further help

- They are younger than 3 months
- They are younger than 6 months and have a temperature of more than 38°C
- They are younger than 2 years and have pain in both ears
- The earache has not improved after 4 days
- The ear is discharging
- They have other illnesses which might affect their ability to fight infection
- They are unwell in themselves with other symptoms such as vomiting, very high temperature, rash, confusion or drowsiness

2. Ear canal infection (otitis externa)

What it is

Infection in the ear canal (also called otitis externa). This type of infection is more common in adults than children. It is more common in people who swim. It may also occur in people who have skin conditions such as eczema around the ear.

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Symptoms to expect

- Sore itchy ear
- Discharge coming out of the ear
- Ear may feel blocked
- May not be able to hear as well as usual

Self-care

- Treatment for otitis externa is usually eardrops or an ear spray
- Eardrops called acetic acid drops (EarCalm®) available over the counter will treat most cases of otitis externa

Normal duration

- Most people will start to feel better after 2-3 days of treatment
- Should be back to their normal self after 7 days

When to seek further help

- If this is the first time you have had symptoms
- If symptoms do not clear after 7 days with an over the counter spray
- If symptoms are more severe with pain/discharge/loss of hearing

3. Wax

What it is

Wax is a natural substance produced by the ears to protect the ear canals. However, sometimes a plug of wax can form, blocking your ear canal.

Symptoms to expect

Pain and deafness on the affected side

Self-care

- It is important never to try and remove the wax with a cotton bud as this may push the wax further down the canal and cause a blockage
- Wax can usually be removed with over the counter ear drops (olive oil or sodium bicarbonate) applied three times a day for 1-2 weeks

When to seek further help

- Wax for first time
- Diagnosis is in doubt
- Previous history of damage to the eardrum
- Wax has not cleared after 2 weeks with over the counter treatment (see nurse for ear syringing, which is irrigation with water). Please be aware that this cannot be done without using drops first as it is unlikely to be successful and risks damage to the eardrum