

# Patient information from BMJ

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## How to help your child avoid ear infections

**Ear infections (both inner and outer) are very common, especially in children. Taking certain steps might lower your child's chances of developing them. Here are a few things you can try:**

- Don't smoke near your child, and make sure others don't either. This is because cigarette smoke can irritate the tube between your child's throat and ear.
- Ensure your child washes their hands frequently, particularly before eating.
- If you can breastfeed your newborn baby, ideally you should exclusively breastfeed for the first 6 months (i.e., feeding with breast milk only). Breastfeeding your baby lowers their chance of ear infections in the years to come.
- If you bottle-feed your baby, ensure they're feeding in an upright position. Babies who drink from a bottle lying down seem to get ear infections more often.
- Ensure your child's vaccinations are up to date.
- Avoid giving your child a dummy beyond 6 months.
- If your child swims, make sure they're using ear plugs or wearing a swimming cap to cover their ears.
- Ensure any skin conditions (for example, eczema) affecting the ear are being treated.
- Don't use anything (i.e., cotton wool buds or fingers) to clean the inside of your child's ears.
- Avoid getting water or shampoo/conditioner in your child's ears during showers or baths.

You can see our other patient information on ear infections for more background: *Middle ear infection*, *Outer ear infection*, and *Ear infections in children: questions to ask your doctor*.

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