

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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