



University of North Carolina Wilmington
Abrons Student Health Center

INSTRUCTION SHEET: OTITIS MEDIA

The Student Health Provider has diagnosed otitis media, also known as middle ear infection. Otitis media is an infection (bacteria or virus) of the middle ear, the area behind the ear drum. Most often, symptoms include ear pain and fever. Middle ear infection is very common in infants, fairly common in children, and also seen in adults.

Otitis media usually improves with time alone. Sometimes, an antibiotic is recommended.

MEASURES YOU SHOULD TAKE TO HELP TREAT THE MIDDLE EAR INFECTION:

1. Over-the-counter pain medications can relieve discomfort associated with external otitis. Acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen, or naproxen can be taken, depending on individual preference.
2. Drink plenty of fluids.
3. If an antibiotic is prescribed, take the medicine as directed. Take the antibiotic until it is gone, not just until pain and fever improve; otherwise, the infection may return, and the risk of hearing loss is greater.
4. Ear drops are not effective for otitis media. The drops cannot penetrate the eardrum to fight infection in the middle ear.
5. If the symptoms worsen, go to the closest emergency department or see your personal/referral doctor *at once*. Specifically, seek care if there is: a markedly ill appearance, severe headache, extreme irritability, stiff neck, high fever not responding to treatment, or if the fever and pain continue after several days of antibiotic treatment.
6. If the symptoms improve, return to the Student Health Center to have the ear checked. The provider can make certain the infection is gone. Return within a week of finishing the antibiotic.