

some facts about . . . MIDDLE EAR PROBLEMS

Researchers have reported that as many as 95% of all children have an episode of middle ear problems (otitis media) before age six. This makes the condition one of the most common childhood illnesses, second only to upper respiratory infections.

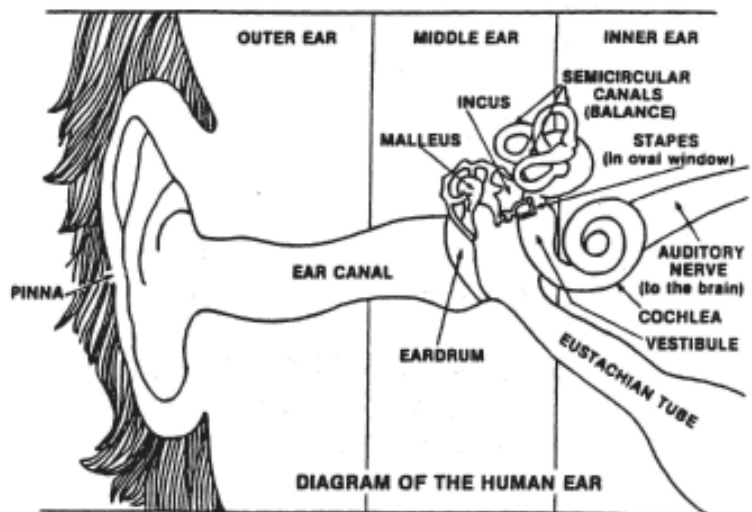
The incidence of otitis media has been found to be a function of age (prevalent in preschool age children), sex (more common in boys), race (more whites than blacks), genetic factors, socio-economic status, season, and climate.

The presence of fluid in the middle ear space or an active ear infection can interfere with a child's perception of many environmental sounds. If a child cannot hear a particular speech sound, for example, the child may have difficulty producing that sound, and speech and language development may be delayed as a result. You can see why a child's performance in school may be affected - - the child may seem "slow", disinterested or to be just not paying attention - - when, in fact, the child may lack awareness that anything is going on. There may even be actual ear discomfort.

This is why it is so important for parents and teachers to become aware of the possible signs and symptoms of this problem, and what can be done about it.

A MIDDLE EAR PROBLEM:

- May occur only once or may keep coming back
- May or may not produce infection
- May be so mild that it goes unnoticed
- May result in a serious medical condition, especially if it goes untreated
- Should be made known to school personnel at the time of registration and throughout the school year so that they can also watch for signs of a hearing loss



WHAT SHOULD YOU LOOK FOR?

1. Does the child seem to hear fine one day, but “tune out” the next?
2. Does the child receive plenty of sleep but there are noticeable “circles” under his or her eyes?
3. Have you noticed a behavior change in that the child is grumpy and out of sorts, and just not behaving as he or she normally would?
4. Does the child often ask for things to be repeated?
5. Does the child often answer a question with an unrelated answer?
6. Does the child seem to pull or tug at his or her ears?
7. Is speech-language development delayed?
8. Does the child seem to watch or concentrate on the speaker’s face?
9. Does the child answer appropriately when spoken to from another room?
10. Does the child experience many fevers, colds, or allergies?
11. Does the child seem to have a balance problem?
12. Does the child use a “soft” speaking voice?
13. Does the child turn the television/radio/stereo to louder listening levels than anyone else in the family?

Although there may be a few cases in which a child does not seem to have any of the above symptoms, it is more likely that a child with a middle ear problem will demonstrate at least a few of them. Also, some of these symptoms may be present but not represent a problem, i.e., the child may just like to listen to music louder than others. At any rate, as with other health problems, the earlier you identify this condition, the better.

If you suspect a problem:

1. Consult your family doctor or your child’s pediatrician. Your doctor may, in turn, send you to see a medical specialist such as an otologist or an otolaryngologist (physicians who treat ear problems).
2. Have your child’s hearing tested by an audiologist, who may work in a hearing clinic, a hospital, or a doctor’s office, in order to determine and monitor the degree of hearing loss present.