



## EYE HEALTH

**Babies, children and teenagers have different eye health needs than adults. Some problems, like amblyopia, that can be treated in babies and young children, become irreversible once a child is older.**

**Once a child's best eyesight is established, it's crucial to protect it from injury, bad habits like smoking, or other poor choices. Below are some common eye health problems your child may experience.**

### Blocked tear ducts

Tear ducts are narrow tubes which drain tears from the eye to the nose. Sometimes these ducts may be blocked, often from birth, so that fluid is unable to drain away.

The main symptoms are a yellowy discharge which collects in the corner of the eye, along with persistent watering of the eye. If the eye appears to become more seriously infected, see your doctor immediately. Keep the eye clean and try not to worry. Approximately 1 in 20 babies are born with tear duct blockages.

Once you are sure the eye is not infected, it can be helpful to gently massage the skin just below the inner corner of the eye. Make sure your hands are washed before and after and repeat the massage three times a day until the baby's eye becomes less watery. This may enable the tear duct to open within a week or two.

If the tear duct remains blocked, your doctor may refer you to a specialist, who can clear the obstruction, under general anaesthetic, with the use of a thin metal probe.

### Conjunctivitis

Conjunctivitis is usually caused by a viral infection (in older children), or a bacterial infection (from the birth canal) in newborns. It is easily spread by hand-to-eye contact, and although rarely serious, it is highly contagious.

Allergic conjunctivitis can occur as a result of hay fever, or allergies to dust and pollen. In rare cases, conjunctivitis can result from a mother with gonorrhoea, genital herpes or a chlamydial infection. It is advisable to consult your doctor if you suspect conjunctivitis.

Bacterial infections can be treated with antibiotic creams or anti-inflammatory eye-drops, whereas viral infections generally clear up without formal treatment within a week. Symptoms can include: redness of the white of the eye and inside of the eyelid; swollen, itchy eyelids; persistent thick or watery, yellow discharge; and crusts of discharge that dry out during sleep.

You can help by bathing the eye and eyelashes with cotton wool, soaked in cooled, boiled water. Use a clean piece for each wipe of the eyes. Hands should be washed before and after touching the affected areas, and wash-cloths and towels kept separately from the rest of the family.

***Fact: Children are not born with ear infections but they can get an ear infection soon after birth.***

## Styes

A stye is the result of a bacterial infection, which usually appears as an inflamed swelling of the lower eyelid. Although styes can be passed from one eye to the other, they are not that highly contagious. They can generally be treated at home by applying a warm cloth to the area, which is especially helpful if the inflammation is accompanied by pus. Simply wash away as often as necessary. Wash hands before and after soothing the eye. If styes tend to reoccur in your child, see your doctor who may prescribe an antibiotic cream or eye drops. And make sure to keep your child's facecloth and towel separate from the rest of the family to avoid spreading infection.

## EAR HEALTH

We all want children to have a strong start to life. That's why hearing is so important. When a child's ears are healthy they can:

- learn language and talking;
- listen to family stories;
- listen to music;
- talk with family and friends;
- be good at school;
- feel good about themselves; and
- get a job later in life.

You can keep children's ears healthy by getting them checked regularly by a health worker, nurse or doctor, even if they seem okay.

It is also important to know the symptoms of ear disease in case your child's ears get sick.

## Otitis Media

Ear infections, also called otitis media, are a common problem in children. About 50 percent of infants have at least one ear infection by their first birthday. Ear infections can cause pain in the ear, fever, and temporary hearing loss and general signs such as loss of appetite and irritability. Some children get better without specific antibiotic treatment but most young infants benefit from use of an antimicrobial agent.

Ear infections most often develop after a viral respiratory tract infection, such as a cold or the flu. These infections can cause swelling of the mucous membranes of the nose and throat, and diminish normal host defenses such as clearance of bacteria from the nose, increasing the amount of bacteria in the nose.

### EAR INFECTION SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of an ear infection in adolescents and older children may include ear aching or pain and temporary hearing loss. These symptoms usually come on suddenly.

In infants and young children, symptoms of an ear infection can include:

- Fever (temperature higher than 100.4°F or 38°C, see the table for how to measure a child's temperature) (table 1)
- Pulling on the ear
- Fussiness or irritability
- Decreased activity
- Lack of appetite or difficulty eating
- Vomiting or diarrhea
- Draining fluid from the outer ear (called otorrhea)

### EAR INFECTION TREATMENT

Treatment of an ear infection may include:

- Antibiotics
- Medicines to treat pain and fever
- Observation
- A combination of the above

The "best" treatment depends on the child's age, history of previous infections, degree of illness, and any underlying medical problems.





## Ear Ache

Earache is the main symptom of middle ear inflammation known as otitis media. It often accompanies a cold, and is common in children under the age of eight years. It is the result of an infection which spreads from the narrow canal connecting the middle ear to the throat. The infection produces fluid which blocks the Eustachian tube, causing pain.

It may be necessary to take your child to the doctor if you are concerned about it, or if the earache doesn't ease. Severe or frequent earaches may require antibiotic medication. In general however, earache responds well to home treatment methods and often eases of its own accord.

Ask your pharmacist or doctor about ear drops; there are herbal drops available as well. Comfort your child by wrapping up a hot-water bottle and placing over the affected ear. Lay your child with the sore ear down, which will help the ear drain of fluid.

## Inflammation & 'Glue Ear'

Inflammation of the outer ear is another common childhood condition, caused by bacteria, dermatitis or atopic eczema. With this condition, there is a visible discharge evident in the outer ear canal. It can be tempting to clean this away, but if possible, leave it for your doctor to examine. You can help ease your child's discomfort by using paracetamol for pain, and a wrapped hot-water bottle against the ear. Avoid getting the ear wet until it has healed.

Glue ear is a long term condition which occurs as a result of recurrent middle ear infections, and is characterised by thick glue-like secretions in the ear. It may also be accompanied by a cold or throat infection.

Glue ear is not usually painful and therefore can linger on, undetected for a long time. Often it can affect hearing though, and this may be when it first becomes apparent. Sometimes glue ear clears on its own; while in some cases, a course of antibiotic medication is required. In long term, more serious cases, small ventilation tubes (called "grommets") may be inserted into your child's ear during a brief operation.

### Want more information?

**Department of Health**  
<http://www.health.gov.au>

**Royal Melbourne Childrens hospital -**  
online resources  
[www.rch.org.au](http://www.rch.org.au)

**The Sydney Childrens hospital -**  
online resources  
<https://www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/>

**Healthdirect**  
Phone 1800 022 222, 24 hours To speak  
to a registered nurse  
[www.healthdirect.gov.au](http://www.healthdirect.gov.au)

**Raising Children Network**  
For information on raising children  
[www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)

**Parents website**  
[www.parents.com](http://www.parents.com)

**Kids Health**  
<http://kidshealth.org/en/parents/head-lice.html>

**Department of Health**  
<http://www.health.gov.au>

**Parentline NSW**  
Phone 1300 1300 52  
9am - 9pm weekdays and 4pm - 9pm  
weekends for advice on child health and  
parenting

### Local Services

**Lismore Community Health - Child  
and Family**  
Phone 02 6620 7687  
8am – 5pm, Monday to Friday to make  
an appointment.

**Goonellabah Child and Family Health  
Centre:**  
Phone 02 6625 0111  
9am – 4:30pm, Monday to Friday to  
make an appointment.