

## **EARACHES – THE OBSERVATION OPTION**

Parents worry when their children's ears hurt. But, not every child with an earache needs an antibiotic. In fact, most children who have earaches get better without an antibiotic.

### ***What happens when children are given antibiotics that are not really needed?***

Doctors use antibiotics to kill bacteria. But, sometimes, the bacteria are strong enough to resist the antibiotic. Then, each time your child takes an antibiotic, more resistant bacteria may live and spread to others. Also, when a person is given antibiotics, they may get other problems such as an allergic reaction, rash, diarrhea, upset stomach, and yeast infections.

### ***Do antibiotics help all children who have ear infections?***

Doctors often give antibiotics to treat infections in the middle ear. About eight out of ten children with ear infections get better with no antibiotics at all. If your child has an earache, remember that antibiotics do not relieve pain during the first 24 hours and do not reduce fever any quicker or better than pain medicines. They also do not protect children from getting more ear infections.

### ***If antibiotics only help a few children, why use them?***

Antibiotics work best for children who are under the age of two, or for older children who have really bad ear infections. Before antibiotics were discovered, children with really bad ear infections often became even sicker.

### ***Which children should be given antibiotics? Which should not?***

Your doctor will talk to you about your child. Antibiotics may be right for infants and very young children who have infections, not just fluid in their ears. They may also be right if a child is very sick or has a fever. If the child is older and not very sick, or if the doctor is not sure if it is an ear infection, it may be better to use Tylenol or Ibuprofen for pain, and to wait and watch for up to 72 hours. If the child is still sick after 72 hours, the doctor will probably give an antibiotic. Don't give your child an antibiotic that was not prescribed for them. Make sure your child is given an antibiotic only for a true ear infection, not just fluid alone.

### ***How long should a child take an antibiotic?***

Be sure to give your child all the full dosage of the antibiotic even if your child appears to feel better. You can learn more about the proper use of antibiotics from the American Academy of Pediatrics. Visit their website at [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org).

For additional information on this and other health issues, visit: [MedlinePlus.gov](http://MedlinePlus.gov)