

## Healthtoday

# Sound advice on ear infections

## EAR INFECTIONS

Ear infections include a broad range of diseases that can affect any of the ear structures.

## NATUROPATHY

Naturopathy is a system of holistic health care that encompasses the specific use of natural medicines such as western herbal medicine, nutritional supplements, dietary advice and homeopathic medicines for the treatment of various health problems.

"Ear infections may be acute or chronic. They are more common in children," said Ms Tina Jenkins, a naturopath at Tina Jenkins Natural Healing Centre.

Ear infections can be a result of chronic inflammation or an acute infection (often bacterial), which may be followed by an upper respiratory tract infection such as sinusitis or cold.

Naturopaths perform a standard physical examination to check a patient's temperature, throat and most importantly, the condition of the eardrum.

If the eardrum is likely to rupture or if the fever is very high, then the patient may be referred to a general practitioner (GP).

If, however, the ear infection is mild, then naturopathy plays an important role in treating and preventing further infection in the ear.

A common presentation at a naturopathic clinic is that of a child with recurrent ear infections who has been prescribed frequent courses of antibiotics. Yet, the infection returns.

Chronic ear infections may be associated with food intolerance, particularly to foods such as cow's milk or dairy products that are commonly associated with an increase in mucus production.

This often causes congestion and blockage in the ear.

A naturopath will determine whether or not food intolerances are contributing to the ear infection and address this in their treatment plan.

Various herbs may be used to help boost the immune system, drain the congested ear and decrease associated inflammation.

For chronic or recurrent ear infections, two to three months of treatment may be required to sufficiently strengthen the immune system in order to prevent the recurrence of such ear infections.

## HOMEOPATHY

Homeopathy is a system of healthcare that treats a wide variety of ailments by strengthening the immune system.

According to Dr Lilly Leong, a homeopath at Fundamental Homeopathic Centre, middle ear infections (otitis media) are most commonly found in young children suffering from a cold.

It can be quite painful and lingering if the condition is not treated properly.

Homeopathy differs from conventional medicine because homeopathy doesn't focus only on treating the ear infection.

It also focuses on the child who has a pattern of ear infections and works to stop that pattern.

Children who suffer from recurrent ear infections probably have other physical and/or emotional problems.

Thus, it is important to treat the child as a whole. They will have a certain type of personality, certain likes and dislikes and other characteristics that make them unique.

This information helps in the search for a right homeopathic remedy that will



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strengthen the whole body.

So when the child's health improves, the ear infections and other ailments associated with it may go away.

Dietary and lifestyle changes are very important to avoid recurrent ear infections. Decrease in the consumption of dairy products and avoiding smoking may also help.

## MODERN MEDICINE

The ear is divided into the external, middle and inner ear.

"Infection involving the external ear is termed as otitis externa and that involving the middle ear is known as otitis media," explained Dr Lim Ing Ruen, associate consultant, Otolaryngology (ENT), Head and Neck Surgery service at Alexandra Hospital.

Otitis externa tends to afflict individuals with a habit of digging their ears.

Regardless of the instrument used, digging removes the protective layer of earwax and causes micro abrasions resulting in ear pain and blocked ears.

Treatment includes the use of antibiotic ear drops, keeping the ear dry as well as abstinence from unnecessary cleaning of the ears.

Sometimes, it might be necessary to see an ENT (Ear, Nose and Throat) doctor to have the debris cleaned.

Acute otitis media is a short-term

infection of the middle ear often associated with a cold.

This type of infection is observed more in children as they have more horizontal Eustachian tubes.

The Eustachian tube is a tube connecting the middle ear with the post-nasal space. It allows equalisation of middle ear air pressure with the atmospheric pressure.

This causes an infection to spread easily from the middle ear to the nose.

Antibiotics are then needed to remedy the condition.

Chronic otitis media is a long-term disease associated with a perforation (hole) in the eardrum. This is more common in adults.

The infection presents itself as intermittent drainage from the ear during acute exacerbations.

Over time, the hearing mechanism in the middle ear erodes, resulting in loss of hearing. Treatment of the acute infection is usually in the form of antibiotic ear drops.

Doctors may recommend surgery to repair the eardrum. Successful surgery prevents recurrent infections and may improve hearing.

*This article is for your general knowledge only. You should seek medical advice or treatment for any medical condition.*

## PUBLIC FORUM

### Stomach, Liver and Bowel Cancers. Who is at risk? What can be done?



The digestive tract, consisting of the stomach, liver and bowel, is the most common site for cancer development. With early detection, cancers in the digestive tract are potentially curable. Find out if you are at risk and what can be done to prevent these cancers.

**Speaker** : Dr Gwee Kok Ann – Associate Professor, Consultant Gastroenterologist & Physician, President of IBS Support Group  
**Date** : 21st May 2005, Saturday  
**Time** : 2.30pm – 4.00pm  
**Venue** : Northern Hope Medical Specialists' Centre (Next to Coral Edge LRT) 168 Punggol Field #04-08 Punggol Plaza Singapore 820168

- \$5.00 registration fee (Light refreshments are included). Please call 6315 5550 for registrations.
- Please complete payment by cheque. Kindly indicate the following details - name, IC number, address and contact number, the public forum title and date. Payable to "Northern Hope Medical Specialists".
- Participants will be entitled to a free Fecal Occult Blood Test – a screening test that detects not only advanced but also early signs of colorectal cancer.

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 From ECP/TPE or from SLE/TPE, Punggol Road Exit 9