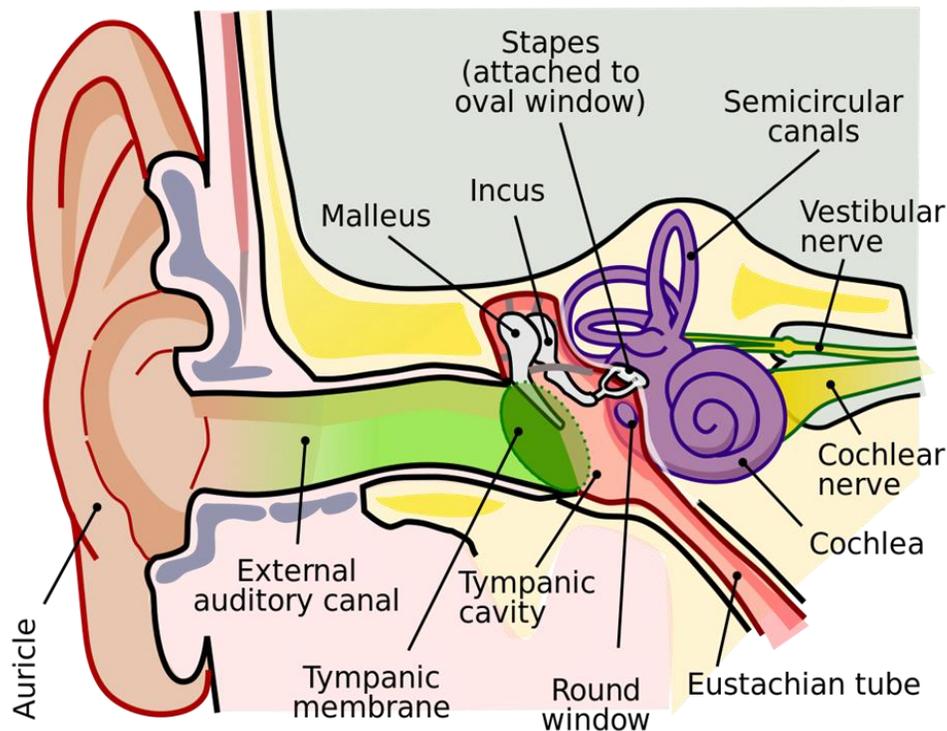


Ear Infections (Otitis) Brightside

By Dr. Derek Conte

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Earaches (Otitis) are common and can affect anyone of any age. They can be extremely painful and, if neglected, dangerous. There are three types of Otitis, each affecting a different part of the ear.

Otitis Externa, or “swimmer’s ear”, is an infection of the outer canal leading up to the eardrum. This is the sound-collecting part of the ear. Usually, the ear canal has been too moist, promoting infection near the eardrum due to fungi or bacteria.

Otitis Interna is an infection of the inner ear, the area that provides our sense hearing and balance, including our sense of motion and static position. These infections can produce headaches, tinnitus (ringing), vertigo, nausea, deafness and, because of its proximity to the brain tissue, encephalitis and meningitis if left untreated. Inner ear infections must be closely monitored. Otitis interna affects mostly 30-60 year-olds.

Otitis Media (best-known form) is a middle ear infection affecting the chamber between

the outer and inner ear areas and contains the eardrum and three tiny bones which receive vibrations from the outside world. At the bottom of this chamber is the Eustachian tube, which functions like the waste pipe of a toilet, and rids the chamber of fluids and impurities. If this tube becomes clogged or too narrow to pass material to the throat, the back-up can cause infection, increased pressure and great pain. High-frequency hearing loss and vertigo (loss of balance) often result. Otitis media also presents with a sense of “fullness” in the ears and head. Otitis media can also progress into the more dangerous otitis interna.

Otitis Externa and Media are very common among children because their immature skulls have ear canals slope downward toward the eardrum, allowing moisture and microbes to settle there. In adults the canals slope away from the eardrum. Conversely, bacteria from the throat can creep up the Eustachian tube and into the middle ear to cause infection. Repeated childhood infections are a big problem, causing much suffering, including burst eardrums. The medical treatment is usually to give pain medication, ear drops or, if persistent, antibiotics are administered. In extreme cases, a tube is placed in the eardrum to relieve the pressure. While this method helps in the short term, the eardrum is scarred and the hole doesn't always close when the tube falls out after several years.

A more elegant solution is to encourage the Eustachian tube to open up and do its intended job. This can be achieved with a simple adjustment to the cartilage of the outer ear. Patients report less pain, good balance and improved sensitivity to soft and high-frequency sounds. Here's an example: One of my patients loves to read the paper outside on the porch every morning. After her first ear adjustment, Carol said, “I can hear the birds again!” Now she never leaves the office without reminding me, “Don't forget to check my ears!” But there are things you can do any time to get relief. A great and simple trick that may work for you is to chew some gum until the ears pop and this should help them open. Check with your chiropractor today.