My wife and I have been in private practice, specializing in helping children and their families for the past 11 years. Of all the issues that happen with our pediatric patients, ear infection is probably the most common. We compiled this information and these tips for our practice, and you can use them to help prevent, comfort or correct possible infections in your child.

Ear infections are a very important topic. This is commonly the condition that starts children down the antibiotic superhighway, of which it seems there’s no return. No parent forgets the trip.
to the doctor after having their child (especially their first) wake up in the middle of the night screaming and clawing at the side of their head while sweating with fever. Not a pretty picture. But are antibiotics and medical intervention the only option when it comes to childhood ear infections? The easy, quick answer is no.

I want to start off by clarifying that not all “ear infections” are actually infected ears, or even infections. Children’s Eustachian tubes (ear canals) are not slanted down like those of adults. Their canals are straight across or horizontal, making it hard for your baby to get much help from gravity to move the fluid from the lymph nodes and the ears into the throat and out of their body. The problem comes when fluid and congestion build up in the lymph nodes in the sides of the neck and throat and cannot be moved or flushed out of the child’s body. That fluid has to go somewhere, so if the fluid can’t go back down, then it will frequently back up into the child’s Eustachian tube, causing fluid pressure on the back of the ear drum. This pressure will cause swelling and irritation—pain—just like an infection, and if left unaddressed long enough can progress into an infection. The problem, though, is that most pediatricians are medicating the kids they see before they know whether or not they actually have an infection.

Many of us have gone through this in the past: We’ve taken our child to the pediatrician because they are obviously in pain, acting funny, or pulling at their ears, and the doc looked in their ears with the otoscope and said, “Yep, it’s red. Little Johnny’s got an ear infection. I’ll write you a script for an antibiotic.” Think about that for a minute. How did the doctor know, just from the color of the tympanic membrane (eardrum), that your child had an infection? He didn’t. The only way to truly diagnose an infection in the ear is by doing a swab of the ear and culturing the area. Then they can see for sure whether or not your child actually has an infection. If they don’t do that, the problem more than likely is fluid buildup behind the eardrum. Or the area may simply be irritated (red, swollen and/or painful) due to teething, because the ears are close to the gums and mouth and often react when this area is under stress.

Now, of course, if your child is running a raging fever and the side of her face and head are on fire and the ear is oozing a colorful pus, then yes, you could definitely say she has an infection. But for the majority of children going into the pediatrician’s office for discomfort, sleep issues, or whatever the parent noticed lately, the problem isn’t necessarily an infection. The reason for prescribing antibiotics without a true infection diagnosis is that if your child is having an underlying infection, the drug will take effect. But the less you have to medicate your child, the better, and if there’s not an actual infection there are other options.

So what do you do if your child is fussy and having issues with one or both of their ears? Are there things you can do besides medication to help her feel better and help the fluid move out of
the Eustachian tube? Absolutely. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that the best approach for an ear infection is to “watch and wait.” They don’t even recommend routine antibiotics for this condition, and say that most heal at the same rate whether you take meds or simply wait and do nothing.

So what the heck are you supposed to do if your child is not infected but has issues with too much fluid in her ears?

Managing Fluid

The first order of business is to help their body get rid of the extra fluid building up in their ear canal. There are a few different ways to help their little bodies do the job:

1. **Moist heat.** One of the best things that helps with circulation is moist heat. Taking a wash cloth and wetting it with warm water and placing it on the irritated side of the neck and head helps to increase circulation to the ear and the ear canal. Make sure to not only put the cloth over the ear, but down the side of the neck as well. This will help drain the lymph nodes in the sides and front of the neck.

2. **Massage.** Infant massage helps to move the fluid out of the lymph nodes and out of the ears. Using only enough pressure to dent the skin, start your massage behind the ear where you feel your child’s bony prominence (mastoid process). From there, work your way down the side of the neck and slightly in front of the neck with long, gentle strokes to help move fluid out of the lymph nodes. If you feel a swollen area as you’re massaging down the side of the neck, do light massage in tiny circles around that area.

3. **Cold Laser Therapy.** One of the many things cold laser therapy helps with is circulation. Using the laser on the area and over the ear will help to move the fluid along and reduce the inflammation. Obviously, this isn’t something you can do at home. But we have a cold laser at our practice, and yours may have one, too.

4. **Chiropractic Adjustments.** Lymph nodes need properly functioning muscles to contract with your baby’s head movements in order to flush out the fluid and congestion that pools in the
Ear Infections in Kids: Natural Remedies to Ease Ear Pain and Enhance Function

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area. If the bones in the top of your baby’s neck become restricted (due to birth or any other type of physical stressor), the muscles around that area cannot contract and work correctly. If the muscles don’t contract perfectly, then the body has a hard time flushing out the fluid in the ear canals. Gentle adjustments to this area help to reduce spasms and re-establish normal motion to a restricted area, which offers tremendous relief when your child has too much fluid in her ears. Adjustments also boost the immune system and help the body to function optimally.

5. Essential Oil Therapy. In our office we use and recommend Young Living Essential Oils and have used them in our clinic for the past nine years. The oils are amazing and work fantastically well with children because they soak directly into the skin (with topical application) or are absorbed and used through inhalation (if diffused). This is so much easier and safer than trying to get your child or infant to orally take any type of supplements. It also doesn’t matter whether your child’s digestive system is functioning perfectly or not since the oils work directly, not relying on the digestive system to break them down. Never put the oils directly into your child’s ears, as they can burn their ear drum and cause extra pain. Always use a carrier oil (coconut oil, olive oil, V6 oil) to dilute the oil you’re using to make sure it doesn’t irritate the skin. The following oils are the ones we use the most for “ear infections” or fluid for our pediatric patients:

A) Lemon Oil. Great for immune function and lymphatic drainage. Rub 1–2 drops into the sides of the neck that are swollen or congested. Do this every couple of hours while the child is experiencing the congestion.

B) Melrose Oil. Powerful anti-inflammatory and antiseptic. Rub alongside of the neck starting behind the ear, and also apply around the cranial (skull) bones on the side of the head around the ear in question.

C) Lavender Oil. The Swiss army knife of oils, incredible for inflammation. You can apply this either to the site or to the bottoms of the feet.

D) Copaiba Oil. Another anti-inflammatory. If your child is teething, use this oil to massage into his gums to reduce swelling and help with the process. This will keep the extra inflammation from moving back into the ear canal.
We use Young Living oils and recommend them due to their quality control and unmatched purity. This year the company came out with a brand new KidScents line that includes several great blends that are already conveniently pre-diluted for many of the most common childhood issues.

## Pain Relief

If your baby is exhibiting signs of a possible infection, or if they’re not necessarily infected, but are having a lot of pain, there are other things to do:

1. **Garlic and Mullein Drops.** A company named Herb Pharm has a product called Garlic and Mullein drops that you can use to help with inflammation and pain in the ear. It smells garlicky, but it really does help to reduce the pain and swelling. You can also make your own garlic drops by crushing a couple garlic cloves and adding them to warm water to put into the ear.

2. **Warm olive oil.** Taking a tablespoon and using steam over the stove, you can heat up some olive oil and then use either a medicine dropper or a cotton ball to drop the olive oil into the irritated ear. This helps to soothe the ear and reduce swelling.

3. **Colloidal Silver.** Putting colloidal silver in the ear will help to kill any bacteria congregating in the ear canal. Killing off these bacteria will help to reduce the swelling, which will help to reduce the overall pain.

4. **Rock Salt.** What? I know, I know. Just keep reading. You can buy rock salt at most grocery stores. Put some rock salt in the bottom of a sock and either microwave or bake the sock until it is a little more than warm. Place the sock over your child’s ear on the infected side and it will help decrease the tenderness, improve circulation and pull fluid from the canal.
Moist Heat. On top of helping with circulation, moist heat really helps with comfort.

Nursing. Make sure you nurse often and on demand during a situation where your child's ears are bothering him. This provides comfort and supports extra circulation—and if there is an infection, you are giving your child all the antibodies they need to fight off the invader!

Immune Boosters

The other thing that is really important is boosting up your child's immune system during this time. Here are a few really important immune boosters to take yourself (if you're breastfeeding) or to give directly to your child:

1. Probiotics. The stomach and digestive tract play a huge role in immune function. There’s actually no way to have a properly functioning immune system if your digestive tract is a mess. Probiotics are the good bacteria that help to regulate, support and protect your system. Make sure that you buy a probiotic that is not cultured from dairy. Many of them are, so read the fine print. Dairy in a probiotic can be an allergen that limits its function. Innate Choice makes the high-quality nondairy probiotic we keep in our offices.

2. Thymex. This product is made by Standard Process and is a thymus extract supplement that helps to boost immunity by stimulating the thymus gland. The thymus gland produces T lymphocytes, which direct the entire immune response. This product is very affordable and works really well. Consult your practitioner for dosage instructions.

3. Omega-3 fats. In order for your body to heal, it needs the proper amount of cholesterol; proper fats help build the cholesterol needed for healing. Taking a sufficient amount of omega-3 fats (fish oil, flax oil, borage oil) is vital in helping the body rebuild and boost the immune system. Again, our favorite company for these is Innate Choice.
4. **Vitamin D**. Children should be getting 500 IUs of vitamin D per day. This supplement is a great immune booster and helps support the respiratory system.

5. **Zinc**. This is the mineral of the immune system. If you or your child is deficient, it can really slow down the immune response.

6. **Thieves Oil**. This oil, manufactured by Young Living, is key to boosting immunity and helping fight infection. Use this on the bottoms of your child’s feet and diffuse it in their room while they sleep to further boost their system and fight any systemic infection.

**Dietary Tips**

During a time when your child is fighting irritation in the ear, watch his diet, too. Here are some tips:

1. **Eliminate or reduce sugar intake**. Sugar will reduce your child’s immune system function, the exact opposite of what you want to happen.

2. **Â¬ No caffeine**. None for you if you’re nursing, or for your child if they are older. Caffeine breaks down body tissue and reduces the immune response. Plus it destroys the digestive tract, a huge part of the immune system. Drink more water.

3. **No dyes or artificial sweeteners**. These are potent neurotoxins and will limit either your or your child’s body’s ability to heal.
4. **Increase protein.** This will help to stabilize the blood sugar and speed up healing.

5. **Reduce or eliminate dairy products.** Dairy has naturally occurring sugars in it, and it causes the body to increase mucous production. Therefore, it can contribute to swelling of the ear tissues and increase in fluid.

6. **Regulate gluten.** Gluten is a major allergenic food. If you haven’t taken gluten out of your diet (if nursing) or your child’s diet, consider doing so around this time.

7. **Increase fruits and vegetables.** You want as many “alive” foods in your system as you can to reduce inflammation in both your body and your baby's.

Hopefully the above will give you a few tools to use to help your child in the event of a supposed ear infection.