Holistic care provides comprehensive treatment for the recurrent or persistent ear problems that are so common in young children. The symptoms of ear infections and fluid collection in the middle ear often begin in a baby’s first year, and they can persist into the toddler and preschool ages. Once children reach ages 5 or 6, and their eustachian tubes are more developed, some tend to grow out of these problems. The problems associated with fluid in the ears, including hearing loss, chronic swelling of mucous membranes, lowered resistance to infection and impaired eustachian tube function, can all be addressed using a combined approach of holistic methods.

Don’t expect fluid in the middle ear to resolve quickly, however. It takes at least two to three months to resolve the issues that contribute to the fluid buildup and facilitate drainage of the middle ear. The following treatments, when used in combination, should address the problems.
Lifestyle Changes

Eliminate dairy products from your child’s diet. Milk products are the most common reason for production and stagnation of phlegm in children, and some children are allergic to dairy products. This includes cheese, yogurt and butter.

Allergies, of course, can contribute to ear problems and chronic congestion. In older children environmental allergens may play a part, and at any age food sensitivities may be a subtle
contributor to these problems. IgG allergy testing can be helpful to assess these sensitivities in children over 18 months.

**Chinese Herbs**

Fluid collection in the ears represents just one aspect of the phlegm dampness syndrome that plagues so many children. To address the important issue of mucus production, they often need Chinese herbal formulas as a part of their treatment program. Your herbalist will be able to design a specific individualized program of herbs to help your baby. These may include herbs to bolster immune function, herbs to combat the heat and pathogenic factors that contribute to recurrent or chronic ear infections and herbs to relieve phlegm.

One very important formula for this purpose is minor bupleurum (xiao chai hu tang). Blue Poppy Pediatric Formulas makes a modified version of this formula (Bupleurum & Angelica) to specifically target ear problems. The treatment addresses the digestive dysfunction that leads to dampness and phlegm production. According to Blue Poppy, the formula is intended “for the treatment of pediatric food stagnation transforming into heat and ascending through internal branches of the large intestine channel to steam and fume in the region of the ear. This pattern is commonly seen in pediatric otitis media characterized by pain, fever, restlessness, ear tugging, but no purulent discharge.”

Other formulas, such as Grow & Thrive by Chinese Medicine Works, promote healthy digestive function and a strong immune system. Specific formulas may be needed to address mucus production if it is a prominent factor in the child’s condition. There are many such formulas for your herbalist to prescribe. Other symptoms, such as coughing or accompanying allergies, may indicate the need for a staged program of herbal treatments that heal the various layers of a problem.

**Nutritional Supplements**
Holistic Care of Middle Ear Problems in Children

Written by Randall Neustaedter, OMD
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Mucus collection in the ears or sinuses signifies an inflammatory process; omega-3 supplements, in the form of fish oil, help to relieve this state. Since infection is commonly a component of the middle ear problem, a probiotic formula supplement can normalize the flora and prevent infections. Other immune system activators will also help prevent these infections. These include colostrum, whey protein (in the absence of dairy allergy) and mushroom formulas (reishi, shitaki, cordyceps). Chinese Medicine Works’ Resilience, a liquid extract of mushrooms, can be used for older babies.

Additionally, vitamin D is essential for adequate immune system function. During the winter months when there is minimal sunlight, all babies should be given a 1,000 IU vitamin D supplement. Older children should receive 2,000 IU.

Homeopathy

Homeopathy provides a powerful tool for improving the constitutional health of babies with ear problems. It also has specific remedies for improving the function of the eustachian tube. The most commonly indicated homeopathic remedies for middle ear effusion, according to nineteenth century homeopathic ear specialists (and confirmed by clinical experience since then), are Kali muriaticum and Mercurius dulcis.

Kali muriaticum (potassium chloride) is more often called for when children have a white or greenish yellow nasal discharge, enlarged tonsils and a stuffy sensation in the ear with hearing loss. Mercurius dulcis (mercury chloride), by contrast, should be used when the child has thickened, retracted eardrums with more scarring and a granular appearance to the tonsils. Merc-dulc shares similar symptomatology with other forms of homeopathic mercury, including diarrhea with greenish stools. A differentiating point in older children is that cold drinks ameliorate the conditions of Merc-dulc, but cold air and cold drinks aggravate the conditions of Kali-mur.

Kali-sulphuricum is another important remedy for consideration in middle ear effusion. Kali-sulph discharges tend to be thin, yellow and sticky, accompanied by hearing loss from the effusion. Noises in the ears are common in older children, with itching of the ears and evening pain.
It is often important to treat the underlying constitutional picture with a deep-acting homeopathic medicine that addresses the entire symptom complex of the child. This stimulates an adequate healing process and facilitates the cure of the underlying immune dysregulation that accompanies these symptoms.

**Chiropractic Adjustment**

Classical chiropractic theory recognizes that misalignment of the spine in babies can pull on the muscles of the neck, causing tension and dysfunction. Proper function of the eustachian tube depends upon balanced head and neck musculature. Correcting an imbalance in these structures allows for healthy function of the eustachian tube, draining fluid from the middle ear and distributing air to the middle ear cavity. Correcting any misalignment of the spine in the neck also improves immune system function, since the first and second spinal nerves have a direct effect on immune system responses.

The eustachian tube resides in a bony canal of the skull and passes through the temporal and sphenoid bones. A misalignment of these bones in babies can put pressure on the eustachian tube. Cranial adjustment and restoration of proper alignment of these bones and the cartilage of the eustachian tube will take pressure off the tube and help restore normal function.

These spinal misalignments also impair normal nerve and immune system function, hampering a child's innate capacity for health. As part of a complete holistic program, chiropractic care will work to normalize function of the structures in the ear and bolster the health of the child’s immune system.
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