



Earaches - What causes them?

Earaches can have various causes. But if they occur as part of a common cold (also called flu) then they mainly affect the middle ear. There is a connecting passage between the middle ear and the pharynx: The so-called eustachian tube covered with mucus. The middle ear is similarly covered with mucus and contains auditory ossicles. The eardrum is located between the external ear and the middle ear. Children are more prone to middle ear infections that cause intense earache on one side and it is frequently accompanied by fever, while adolescents or adults have milder symptoms.

What are symptoms of a middle ear infection?

The middle ear infection is frequently seen in children, but adolescents and adults can also be affected by it. Sudden and severe earache that is usually associated with hearing disturbances is the main symptom of an acute middle ear infection. Apart from this, other typical symptoms like irritability, fever, giddiness and a general feeling of being unwell may also be experienced. Sometimes due to a small tear in the eardrum, pus may come out of the ear. The small hole that develops usually grows back by itself. Even in case of active bacteria, four out of five middle ear infections are cured without having to take antibiotics. The average recovery period is around seven days.

How does an earache develop during cold?

When you catch a cold, the viruses spread in the mucous membranes of the respiratory tracts and cause an inflammatory reaction. This inflammation can also affect the connecting passage between the pharynx and the middle ear, the eustachian tube, which subsequently swells. The pressure developed in this way and the inflammation of the mucous membrane causes earache. The secretion formed in the middle ear cannot be drained and hence it accumulates there. If bacteria spread here, then a bacterial middle ear infection is caused.

What should you do if you have earache?

Anticongestive nasal drops can provide relief if you experience uneasiness due to pressure or pain. The mucous membrane in the eustachian tube then subsides and the pressure in the middle ear is reduced. However, the effectiveness of nasal drops for the treatment of a middle ear infection is not proven in scientific studies. This illness can be symptomatically treated for an otherwise healthy adult with the help of painkillers, care and sufficient fluid intake. The pain also subsides by using a warm ear compress. If the symptom has not improved even after several days, then antibiotics may be required. **The treatment guidelines for children are different and are not a part of this text!**