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Otitis Media in Children

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Caring for a child is one of the most demanding challenges that parents face. Fortunately it is also one of the most rewarding. When a baby is unhappy, cries are plentiful but just what do all these cries mean? Often the solution is one of trial and error. Is my baby hungry? Does my baby need a new diaper? Is my baby sick? These are all questions that parents ask on a daily basis. Through time and experience parents begin to learn their baby's needs and cries.

One condition that concerns parents and brings them into the pediatrician's office is ear infections. Acute Otitis Media is an infection or inflammation of the middle ear. This inflammation often begins when infections that causes sore throats, colds, or other upper respiratory problems that may spread to the middle ear. These can be viral or bacterial infections. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, seventy-five percent of children experience at least one episode of otitis media by their third birthday. Almost half of these children will have three or more ear infections during their first 3 years. Children with otitis media have fluid in the middle ear and ear pain, marked redness of the eardrum, and distinct bulging of the eardrum, often with fever.

Traditionally, middle ear infections were treated with antibiotics; however, new studies have determined that this might not always be necessary. Pediatricians have found that giving pain relief and asking the parents to watch their children's symptoms after a period of a few days may be all that is needed, since over 80% will resolve on their own. Other times, antibiotics are indeed needed. This will have to be determined at the time of the child's exam. The concern that doctors have today is the growing number of bacteria that are resistant to antibiotics. These bacteria have become harder to treat since they inactivate the typical antibiotics that are used by pediatricians today. Stronger antibiotics have been developed to treat these resistant bacteria. Judicious use of antibiotics is the goal of the doctor in this day and age.

Developing a solid working partnership with your pediatrician can help reinforce your judgment and build your confidence in your parenting skills. The pediatrician will see your child through many social, emotional and physical developments as he or she grows into young adulthood. Determining when to bring your child in to see the pediatrician is a difficult process. Calling the office and asking appropriate questions can help make this process that much easier.