

Ear Infections and your child

The important role of chiropractic in the management of childhood ear infections is well documented. There are numerous published case studies, as well as a number of published research studies which all support the positive difference chiropractic care may have on a child with acute or chronic ear infections.^(1,2,3,4,5,6)



How does chiropractic influence a child's ear infection?

Chiropractic may have a beneficial influence on a child's ear infection by firstly improving the overall immunological capacity of the child, as well as by promoting improved drainage of the tube which drains the middle ear, (the Eustachian tube).

- Misalignments of the spine (also called subluxations) often occur as a result of childbirth, as well as from the everyday tumbles or falls that a child may experience. Research has shown that a misalignment in the upper cervical region (the upper neck), if left untreated may irritate the nerves and eventually disrupt the ability of the child's body, including the inner ear, to function at their best. The purpose of a chiropractic adjustment is to help to restore the normal functioning of the nervous system so that the immune system works at optimal capacity.
- The positive effect on a child's ear infection which may often result from a chiropractic adjustment is also related to the effect of the adjustment on the drainage of the tube which drains the ear. The younger the child the more horizontal, and therefore difficult to drain, is this tube. Research has shown that spinal dysfunction may affect the function of the muscle which plays an important role in the dilatation mechanism of this tube. It stands to reason therefore that if we can improve the function of this muscle, this then may have a positive influence on the ability of the tube to drain.

A study published in the *Journal of Clinical Chiropractic Pediatrics* reported that there is a strong correlation between chiropractic adjustments and the resolution of ear infections. 332 children with chronic ear infections participated in the study.⁽³⁾ Each child, ranging in age from 27 days to 5 years, was given a series of chiropractic adjustments. The results show that close to 80% of the children did not experience another ear infection within the six-month period following their initial visits.

Antibiotics and Childhood ear infections.

The most common form of treatment for childhood ear infections is the administering of antibiotics, often for a period of 10 days or more. This is despite the fact that the use of antibiotics in the treatment of ear infections is under serious question within the medical profession.⁽⁸⁻¹⁵⁾ Many studies show that antibiotics are *not effective* in treating many cases of otitis media.

- One study compared children treated with antibiotics alone, antibiotics with myringotomy (eardrum perforation), or no treatment.⁽¹⁶⁾ This study found that

there was little difference between the groups in regard to pain, fever, hearing, healing time and recurrences.

- In a large study of 3660 children, it was found that antibiotic treated children recovered at a rate slightly slower than children not receiving antibiotics.⁽¹⁷⁾ The researchers postulated that this may be because the antibiotics kill the body's good bacteria that form a part of the body's natural defence system.
- A study of 4860 children with acute otitis media were treated with pain relievers and ear drops for four days.⁽¹⁸⁾ More than 90% of these children recovered in a few days with no need for further treatment. Only 3% of these cases required antibiotics.
- An article in the Journal of the American medical Association reported that children with chronic otitis media who received amoxicillin suffered 2 to 6 times greater recurrences than those not on the antibiotic.⁽⁸⁾ The researchers postulated that this may be due to the fact that both good and bad bacteria are being destroyed, causing a bacterial imbalance which then may result in immune dysfunction and possible further ear infections.

Research such as this seriously brings into question the fact that over 90% of children who present to their medical doctor with otitis media will be prescribed an antibiotic.

A natural approach to the management of childhood ear infections.

My experience in the management of childhood ear infections has led me to an approach which I believe is rational, evidence-based and most importantly, very effective. In addition to the all important *chiropractic management* of the child, my approach incorporates a combination of one or more of the following:

- Natural ear drops (ear drops should never be administered if there is a suspicion that the eardrum has been perforated).
- Breast Feeding: Breastfeeding may play a significant role in decreasing the chances of a child developing an ear infection. Research clearly demonstrates the link between a child who is bottle fed and ear infections.
- Attention to diet: Food allergies, particularly to wheat and cow's milk, are often a contributing factor in recurrent childhood ear infections. Other foods like eggs, peanuts, soy, chicken, beef and yeasts may also be implicated. The research suggests the food needs to be eliminated for *at least four months* to determine whether there has been a positive clinical outcome. In an infant who is being breastfed, it is important therefore that the mother similarly restricts her diet.
- Probiotics: There is an overwhelming volume of evidence supporting the fact that 'good bacteria' in the digestive system are important for overall immune health and may help prevent childhood infections, including ear infections. ^(19,20)

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