

Treatment of Ear Infections

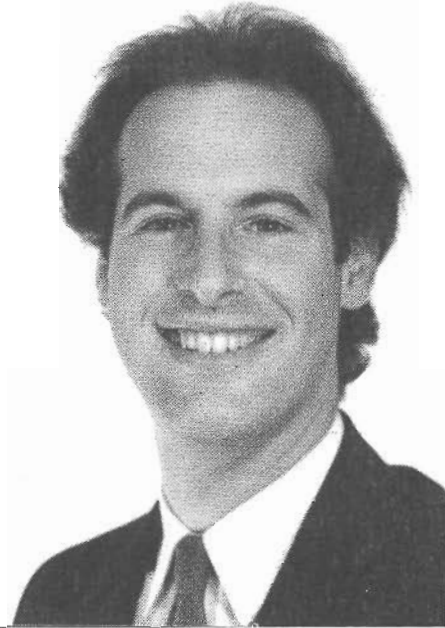
By Dr. Mark Schillinger, D.C.

This is the time of year when many of us become vulnerable to catching cold or flu. These past two winters have been especially cold and it's no accident the incidence of flu has been high during these times. A common manifestation of suffering from colds (bacterial) or flu (viral) is ear infection. While this tends to be a persistent problem with children, adults are certainly prone to having this symptom.

I use the word "symptom" because it's my belief that what most doctors diagnosis as ear infection are not ear infections at all! When I look into the ear of a patient with an otoscope I do not automatically assume that a middle ear infections exists if I see a redness in that ear. The normal pearly white color of the eardrum can turn red due to a fever, allergic reaction to food or aspirin, emotional upset or an excess of cerumen (ear wax). Therefore, the ear redness may be a manifestation of some other problem and not the primary illness to be treated.

Antibiotic medicines are most commonly used to treat ear infections. The drugs are usually prescribed for a ten-day period. The ear symptomology often subsides within three days, and so it is considered that the antibiotics brought about the cure. It's my opinion that most of the time the ear symptomology would have subsided without using the antibiotics. In fact, recent medical literature has shown that ear infections are self-limiting and respond just as quickly without antibiotics. It is important to know this because the repeated use of antibiotics can actually weaken the body's immune system.

The immune system is responsible for protecting ourselves from unwanted bacteria and viruses by producing lymphocytes. Lymphocytes are special cells manufactured in certain glands that search out and destroy invaders (micro-organisms,



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dirt, chemical pollutants, etc.). The overuse of antibiotics can cause the immune system to slow down and even shut off its natural activity as the body learns to rely on outside help (antibiotics). Another medical study revealed that children were more likely to have recurrent ear infections when they were treated with antibiotics that if they were not given the medication!

It is my approach, as it is for other health care practitioners, to first look to strengthen the immune system as the primary form of treatment. I often recommend homeopathic remedies, vitamins or herbs for this purpose. For example, echinacea, comfrey and ginger are herbs that strengthen the mucous membranes of the ears, nose and throat. Thymactiv is a glandular homeopathic remedy that I use to

stimulate the thymus glands, which produces the necessary lymphocytes.

Vitamins A, C, and E are well known for their antibiotic effects and ability to increase blood and lymphatic flow. It is necessary to restrict certain foods from the diet that are mucous forming which provide a favorable environment for bacteria (dairy products, red meats, white flour products, etc.). Fresh fruit and vegetable juices diluted with water are ideal for keeping the blood thin and providing easily absorbable nutrients. A dry bristle brush or loofah sponge should be used to massage the chest, upper back and neck to stimulate lymphatic flow. In our clinic we also use an irrigation ear syringe to clean the outer ear of excess wax if necessary.

I would like to add that in the case of bonafide middle ear infection (otitis media) I have successfully used Endo-Nasal technique (a chiropractic reflex technique) which promotes drainage of the eustachian tube (connects the middle ear to the throat) and the sinuses. The use of this technique has often prevented the unnecessary intervention of tympanic membrane surgery. This surgery involves puncturing the eardrum and inserting a tube to withdraw the infectious fluid. This procedure may induce scarring of the tympanic membrane and cause a loss of hearing in the affected ear.

It is not my intention to discourage you from the use of antibiotic therapy if you are currently using this treatment. I only wish to inform you of alternative choices. If you want a list of the medical studies mentioned or if you want more information on how to prevent and/or treat colds, flus and ear infection contact me at Chiropractic Health Group of Marin, 824 5th Ave., in San Rafael, 94901; 459-6798.