

Earache

What is an earache?

An earache is pain inside or around the ear. It may come and go or it may be constant. You may also have muffled hearing and a feeling of pressure or blockage.

What is the cause?

Earaches can be caused by:

- Injury to the ear
- Infection or disease in the middle or outer ear
- Infection in the nose, sinuses, mouth, or throat
- Infection or injury of the jaw
- A problem with the teeth, usually in the upper molars
- Changes in altitude or air pressure, for example, when you fly in an airplane
- Cold air or wind
- Changes in temperature, for example, when you have been outside in cold temperatures and then walk into a warm room
- A buildup of earwax
- An object, growth, or insect in the ear

Middle ear infection is a common cause of earache. The infection often starts as a cold, sinus infection, or throat infection. It may cause other symptoms, such as green or yellow drainage from the nose, fever, dizziness, loss of appetite, hearing loss, and a feeling of blockage in the ear.

An infection of the outer ear and ear canal may occur when your ear is exposed to moisture that gets trapped in the ear. It usually causes pain or discomfort in or around the ear or when moving the earlobe. You may have redness, swelling, and itching of the ear. Sometimes you will have a feeling of fullness in your ear and have some hearing loss.

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms and medical history and examine you.

How is it treated?

Some ear infections may be treated with antibiotics. If you have an infection, your healthcare provider may wait 1 to 3 days to see if the symptoms go away on their own before prescribing an antibiotic. Bacteria can become resistant to antibiotics, which means the medicine might not kill the bacteria. Also, the medicine can cause side effects. Your provider may recommend a nonprescription pain reliever

and a decongestant (tablets or a nasal spray) to relieve pressure in the middle ear.

Objects in the ear canal, including a buildup of earwax, should be removed by your healthcare provider.

Other treatments depend on the cause of the earache. For example, chewing gum, drinking fluids, or sucking on candy may help stop aching caused by temperature changes or the change in pressure when you are going up or coming down in an airplane. Another way to relieve pressure in the ear is to blow out gently while keeping your mouth closed and nose pinched.

How can I take care of myself?

- If you have an infection, follow your healthcare provider's instructions for taking medicine to treat it.
- A cold pack or cold wet cloth put on the ear for 20 minutes may help decrease pain. Or a warm moist washcloth or a covered hot water bottle put over the ear may help.
- A nonprescription pain medicine such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen can also provide relief. Check with your healthcare provider before you give any medicine that contains aspirin or salicylates to a child or teen. This includes medicines like baby aspirin, some cold medicines, and Pepto-Bismol. Children and teens who take aspirin are at risk for a serious illness called Reye's syndrome.
- Don't use any eardrops for an earache if there is drainage from the ear or there are tubes in the ears unless the drops are prescribed by your healthcare provider.

When should I call my healthcare provider?

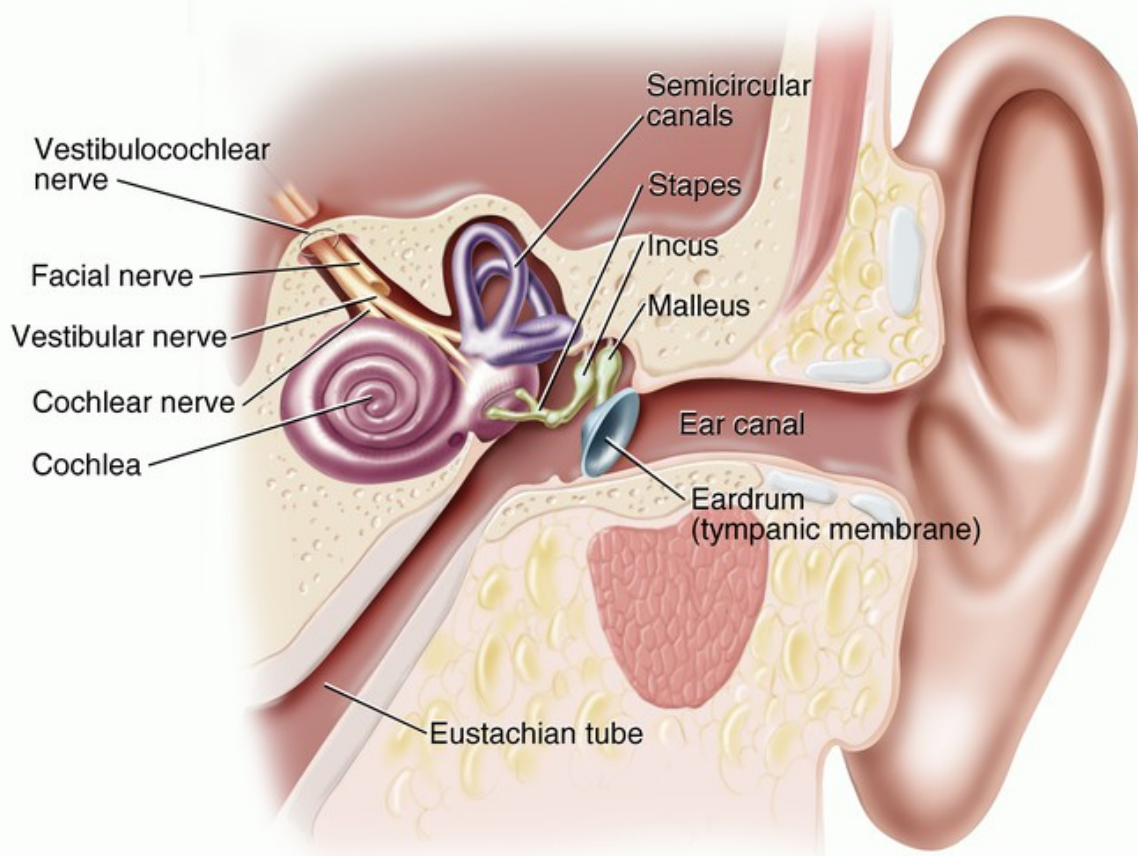
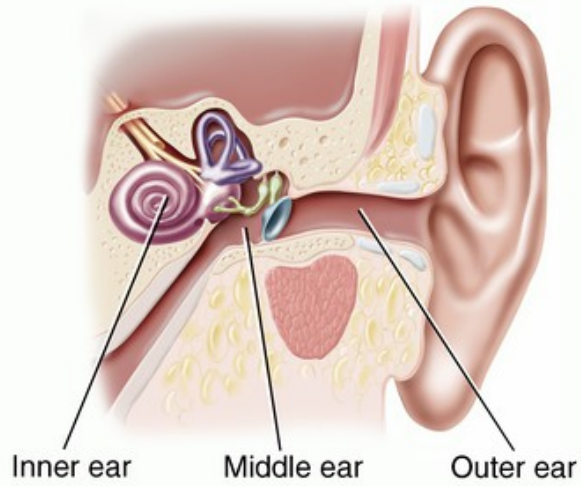
Call your healthcare provider if you have:

- A temperature of 101.5 degrees F (38.6 degrees C) or higher that persists even after you take acetaminophen, aspirin, or ibuprofen
- A severe headache or worsening pain around the ear
- Swelling around the ear
- Increasing dizziness
- Worsening of your hearing
- Weakness of one side of your face

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