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Ear Infections & Language

Here are excerpts from a new booklet "Ear Infections and Language Development," collaboratively published by NCEDL and the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. Brochure authors are Joanne Roberts & Susan Zeisel of the Frank Porter Graham Center at the UNC-Chapel Hill. Information on getting copies of the brochure is on the back of this page.

How Ear Infections Might Affect Language Development

Otitis media, an infection of the middle ear, is a common childhood illness. There are two types and either can occur in one or both ears:

Acute otitis media ("ear infection") is an infection of the middle ear. Fluid may remain in the middle ear even after an infection is gone.

Otitis media with effusion, also called middle ear fluid, is fluid that is not infected. When a child has a cold, the small tube between the ear and the throat can become blocked, causing fluid to build up in the middle ear.

What are the signs of otitis media?

- Child pulls on ear
- Child says ear hurts
- Drainage from ear
- Fever (acute otitis media)
- Irritability
- Poor sleep

How can otitis media affect hearing?

Fluid in the middle ear reduces sounds traveling through the middle ear. Sounds may be muffled or not heard. Children with middle ear fluid will generally have a mild or moderate temporary hearing loss. Some children have no change in their hearing.

Mild hearing loss: A child may not hear or may hear very faintly the soft sounds at the beginnings and ends of words, such as the "s" in "sun" and the "t" in "cat," and words spoken quickly such as "and."

Moderate hearing loss: A child may have trouble hearing most speech sounds and trouble with short, softly spoken words and word endings. Some children have no hearing loss. A hearing loss due to middle ear fluid should go away once the fluid is gone.

Language milestones

Here are selected portions from a two-page chart of milestones of language development. In the brochure, check boxes are provided for each milestone, which are given for children from birth to age 5.

Check One YES NO	Hearing & Understanding	Child's Age	Talking	Check One YES NO
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Understands differences in meaning ("go-stop," "in-on," "big-little," "up-down").	2-3 Yrs	Has a word for almost everything.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Follows two requests ("Get the book and put it on the table").		Uses 2-3-word "sentences" to talk about and ask for things.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
			Speech is understood by familiar listeners most of the time.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
			Often asks for or directs attention to objects by naming them.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Hears you when you call from another room.	3-4 Yrs	Talks about activities at school or at friends' homes.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Hears television or radio at the same loudness level as other family members.		Usually talks easily without repeating syllables or words.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Understands simple "who?," "what?," "where?" questions.		People outside family usually understand child's speech.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
			Uses a lot of sentences that have 4 or more words.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

How to encourage language learning

Take advantage of opportunities every day to help children develop their language. All children can benefit from responsive language interactions, especially children with hearing loss due to otitis media.

- Get down on your child's eye level when talking.
- Listen to your child when your child is talking.
- Talk about familiar things—snacks, pets, rain—anything your child knows and is interested in.
- Talk with your child during mealtimes, baths, and throughout the day.
- Play interactive games with your child to encourage talking, such as pat-a-cake.
- Talk with preschoolers about what they did, what they will do, why things happen, and their feelings.
- When your child says something, respond to what the child is talking about immediately and with interest.

Promoting early learning literacy

Activities such as reading to your child help develop early literacy skills.

- Read often to children, describing and explaining pictures and referring to child's own experiences ("Spot is like your dog.").
- Read slowly to children, pausing at times to ask questions ("What do you think will happen next?").
- Read out loud traffic and store signs, labels of packages, and words on a menu.
- Let children draw and write using crayons, markers, and pencils.
- Sing simple songs with repeated words and phrases.
- Play sound, alphabet and word games that focus on beginning and ending sounds of words.

Other sections in the brochure

- How to promote a healthy setting, which is important for children prone to ear infections
- How to promote listening in children
- How language learning may be affected by otitis media
- How to recognize if your child has a hearing loss.
- How otitis media is treated
- What to do if you are concerned about your child's speech and/or language development

For copies of brochure

A pdf version of "Ear Infections and Language Development," is at our NCEDL web site: www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/PDFs/ome2000.pdf. We also have an html version at www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/PAGES/ome.htm.

For a free copy of the booklet while supplies last, write to the U.S. Dept. of Education, ED Pubs, PO Box 1398, Jessup, MD 20794-1398, or call their toll-free number, 877-4ED-PUBS. Also, check this web site: www.ed.gov/pubs/edpubs.html.

Copies are also available for 50¢ each from the Consumer Information Center. Toll-free at 888-878-3256, weekdays 9 AM to 8 PM EST. Or you may send your name, address and 50¢ a copy to: Consumer Information Center, Dept. 378G, Pueblo, CO 81009.

For more information

Roberts, J.E., Wallace, I.F., & Henderson, F.W. (Eds). (1997). *Otitis media in young children*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing Co.

Watt, M.R., Roberts, J.E., & Zeisel, S. (1993). Ear infections in young children: The role of the early childhood educator. *Young Children*, 49(1), 65-71.

Questions & Answers about Otitis Media, Hearing and Language Development at this Web site: www.asha.org/consumers/brochures/otitis_media.htm

Agency for Health Care Policy and Research. (1994). Middle Ear Fluid in Young Children, Consumer Version, *Clinical Practices Guideline Number 12*. (English and Spanish versions available. Online at [www. Kidsource.com/kidsource/content/mef.html](http://www.Kidsource.com/kidsource/content/mef.html)

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