

Princeton Chiropractic Wellness Center

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Chiropractic Care and Ear Infections

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Ear infections are one of the most common health problems that children suffer from today. (1-3) The medical approach to dealing with this health problem include; administration of antibiotics, myringotomy and tympanostomy all of which have been shown to have limited success in helping with these type of infections. (1,4,5)

Antibiotic intervention is the number one treatment for this condition. (3) Antibiotics are used in approximately 97.9% cases of ear infections and are actually needed in no more than 5-10% of the cases. (10) Unfortunately, it has become common practice for physicians to administer antibiotics for most types of otitis media (ear infections) despite lack of definitive diagnosis. (3,6-9) An independent federally sponsored panel stated that most children do not require antibiotics or surgery for ear infections. (4) This panel stated that the data does not support the effectiveness of either intervention. (4) The overuse and misuse of antibiotics can lead to many problems including, weakening of the immune system, contributing to the increase in resistant strains of bacteria and destruction of the natural microbial flora in the intestines (which normally aid in the digestion of food). (1,3,11-15)

Other common medical interventions include myringotomy and tympanostomy (cutting of the ear drum and insertion of a drainage tube). (1,4,5) These procedures have also been evaluated further and have been shown to be unsafe and ineffective. (4,5,16-24) These common intervention have been shown to be unnecessary in 27-32% of the procedures performed. (23) Side effects of these surgical procedures included cholesteatoma (overgrowth of skin in inner ear), persistent tympanic membrane perforation, tympanosclerosis (scarring of the ear drum), and up to 25% of tympanostomy tube patients have total hearing loss 7-10 years later. (16-22,25) Use of these surgical techniques in children does not provide a guarantee that they will not have a recurrence of the infection. (26,27) In fact, 98% of children undergoing these procedures have a recurrence of effusions within 2 months. (26,27) The reason that such procedures are implemented is to prevent complications such as mastoiditis, a serious infection in the skull. (28) The incidence of mastoiditis in patients treated with antibiotics for otitis media is very low; however, the incidence of mastoiditis for patients not treated with antibiotics is also very low. (29,30) Similarly in both cases the incidence of mastoiditis is approximately .2-2%. (29,30)

Parents are finally realizing that many commonly accepted medical treatments are ineffective and dangerous so they are looking for alternatives. (12) The most common alternative that parents are using with all ear, nose and throat conditions is chiropractic care. (31) Chiropractic adjustments are a safe and effective way to improve how the whole body functions and reacts to the environment. (32,33) The constant drainage of fluids and exudates in the middle ear by the Eustachian tube is crucial for middle ear health and by normalizing the functioning of the Eustachian tube and the immune system,

chiropractic helps the body clear up infections safely and quickly. (15,34) Constant draining of the Eustachian tube is dependant upon the salpingopharyngeus and tensor veli palantini muscles. (15,34) These muscles are controlled by cranial nerve V, which is in turn dependant on the proper movement and alignment of the occiput and upper cervical vertebrae due to the fact that the nucleus of this nerve extends down into the upper cervical spine. (15,34)

Many studies have shown that chiropractic care is beneficial for children. (1,15,35) These studies further demonstrate that there is a strong correlation between chiropractic adjustments and the resolution of ear infections. (1,15,16,35)

Parents may wonder why their child would have disturbances in his nervous system (subluxations) and need chiropractic care. Subluxations can be caused by the overload of physical, emotional and chemical stress (any environmental factor that causes the body to go out of equilibrium). (33) A child's need for chiropractic care may be traceable as far back in life as the birth event. (37) Even during a normal birth there is an enormous amount physical stress put on the baby's neck and may cause subluxations (malpositions of spinal bones causing interference in the nervous system) of the occipital bone and upper cervical spine (neck). (1,3,36,38) When the baby is born the mother is no longer acting as an environmental filter for the baby and now the baby has to deal with a vast number of new chemical stresses on his own. (37) These factors can cause subluxations that can inhibit the function of the Eustachian tube many other crucial functions. (1,3,36,38)

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