Preventing Ear Infections

by Dr. Andrew T. Brady

Ear infections are the second most common disease of childhood and account for roughly 16 million visits to the doctor every year. We've been taught that when we get an ear infection, we need to go to the doctor to get antibiotics. But is this the best option?

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I suffered with chronic ear infections as a child and remember running to the doctor for that delicious bubble gum flavored antibiotic, amoxicillin, every time my ears hurt. Although the antibiotics would help kill the infection, my ear infections always seemed to come back. Our pediatrician recommended "tubes" if I had one more ear infection. I saw a picture on the doctor's wall of what "tubes" looked like and was terrified. I remember getting a few more ear infections but never telling anyone because I was afraid of "getting tubes." My body eventually fought off the infection and I haven't had an ear infection since.

Looking back at my own experience with ear infections, and researching the effectiveness of the current medical treatment, I believe taking antibiotics for ear infections does more harm than good, and there is a lot of evidence to support that. A Cochrane review in 2015 revealed that only 1 of every 20 children treated with antibiotics for ear infections might be helped. They also concluded that 1 in 9 will actually be harmed. Additionally, chronic use of antibiotics has created antibiotic-resistance bacteria, which kills 22,000 Americans every year. Antibiotic use has literally created a dangerous disease that will continue to get worse unless the prescribing of these drugs is significantly reduced. The number of children with a long history of antibiotic use just because of ear infections is concerning. Children are unknowingly being predisposed to these antibiotic resistant bacteria and many other negative health consequences.

The good news is that there are alternatives. When I see children with recurrent ear infections in my office, I always check the first bone in the neck called the atlas. When this bone becomes misaligned, it effects how the Eustachian tubes drain. When fluid in the Eustachian tubes doesn't drain, it can become infected. Antibiotics may treat the infection, but they can't drain the fluid. Re-aligning the atlas with a chiropractic adjustment allows the fluid to drain, which helps prevent future infections. If your child suffers from recurrent ear infections, consider this safe and effective alternative!

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