

Does your Child suffer from Chronic Ear Infections?

Chronic ear infections are the leading cause of visits to pediatricians, affecting two-thirds of children under the age of six. The most common standard medical treatment involves the prescription of antibiotics, analgesics (Tylenol), antihistamines and myringotomy surgery (ear tubes). The use of antibiotics will help relieve the symptoms and kill off the bacteria, but they do not address or treat the root cause of the ear infections. Often, children will become repeatedly sick after treatment with antibiotics. This is due to the suppression of the immune system by the antibiotics and the depopulation of protective flora (probiotics) of the upper respiratory system and gut, increasing future susceptibility of the body to colonization of viruses and bacteria. Thus, I frequently see in my practice children who are chronically and repeatedly sick with ear, nose, and throat infections and who have been prescribed antibiotics two to four times a year. Furthermore, the myringotomy surgery (ear tubes) does not prevent future infections, but, in fact, studies show that there is an increase in ear infection frequency in children who have undergone this procedure.

Children who are not breast fed (or breast fed for less than 9 months) are more highly susceptible to ear infections. Breast milk contains high amounts of antibodies protective against infectious agents, whether bacterial (*Streptococcus pneumoniae* or *Haemophilus influenzae*), or viral (*respiratory syncytial virus* or *Influenza A*). Also, breast milk is typically free of food allergens (particularly if the mother avoids eating foods to which she is allergic during pregnancy and lactation). Infant formulas, on the other hand, usually consist of cow's milk or soy milk which often causes food allergy reactions in children leading to susceptibility of ear infections.

Numerous studies have found a link between food allergies and ear infections: 85-93% of children with chronic ear infections have allergies - 16% to inhalants, 14% to food, and 70% to both. Several studies of children with chronic ear infections have demonstrated that allergy elimination diets successfully prevent recurrence (in 78-92% of patients) and that the reintroduction of the offending foods provokes recurrence (in 94% of patients). The most common food allergies include cow's milk, wheat, eggs, peanuts, soy, corn, tomatoes, chicken, and apples. A naturopathic doctor can prescribe appropriate hypoallergenic diets, along with recipes and dietary advice, as well as perform blood tests to determine food sensitivities that include both delayed and prolonged reactions to foods.

Naturopathic doctors also prescribe immune system support including probiotics, hypoallergenic multi-vitamins for children, echinacea for children, vitamin C, and zinc. These vitamins will help strengthen the immune system and prevent further infections. Stop the vicious cycle of illness and infection and consult a naturopathic doctor to find the root cause of your child's ear infections.