

Throat infections

If you find it painful to swallow and you have a sore throat, your earache could be a symptom of a throat infection, such as [tonsillitis](#) or quinsy (an abscess on one side of the back of your throat, which can sometimes make it very difficult to swallow even fluids).

Some types of tonsillitis will clear up after a few days without the need for [antibiotics](#). But if you have quinsy, you will need to see your GP as soon as possible for treatment. You may have quinsy if your sore throat gets worse very quickly.

A problem with your jaw

Earache is occasionally caused by a problem with the joint of your jaw bone (where the jaw meets the skull). This is known as temporomandibular joint pain and can be caused by problems such as [arthritis](#) or teeth grinding. Jaw pain can often be treated with painkillers, warm or cold compresses, and trying not to clench your jaw and grind your teeth.

A dental abscess

A [dental abscess](#) is a collection of pus that can form in your teeth or gums as a result of a bacterial infection. The main symptom is pain in your affected tooth, which can be intense and throbbing, although the pain can sometimes spread to your ear.

If you think you may have a dental abscess, make a dentist appointment as soon as possible. They may need to remove the abscess and drain the pus.

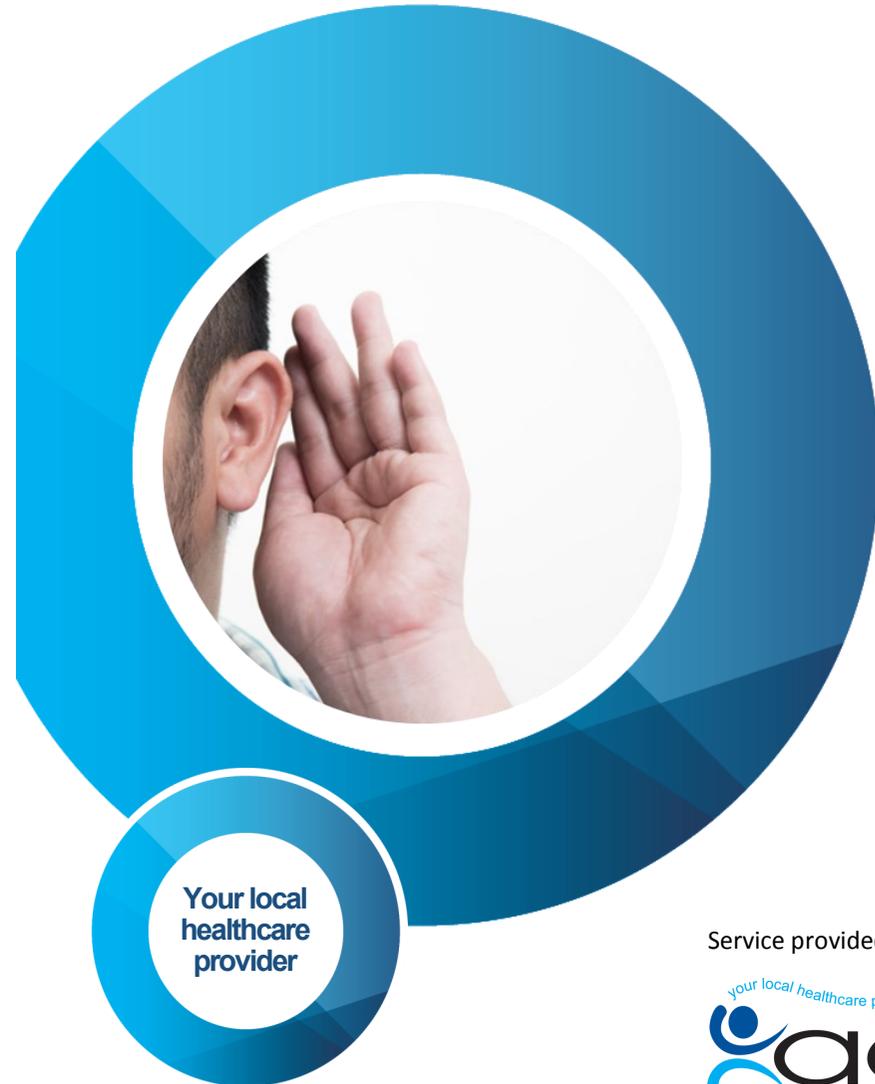
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Earache

Self Care Information



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Earache is a common problem, particularly in children. It can be worrying, but it's usually only caused by a minor infection and will often get better in a few days without treatment. Earache can be a sharp, dull or burning ear pain that comes and goes or is constant. One or both ears may be affected.

When to contact your GP

It's not always necessary to see your GP if you or your child have earache. The pain will often improve in a few days and there are things you can do to help in the meantime.

You should contact your GP or local out-of-hours service if:

- you or your child also have other symptoms, such as a high temperature (fever), vomiting, a severe [sore throat](#), swelling around the ear, or discharge from the ear
- there is something stuck in your or your child's ear
- the earache doesn't improve within a few days

What you can do at home

You can use over-the-counter painkillers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen to treat the pain. Children under the age of 16 should not take aspirin.

Placing a warm flannel against the affected ear may also help relieve the pain.

Your pharmacist may be able to recommend over-the-counter eardrops for your earache, but let them know your symptoms and ask for their advice first.

Eardrops or olive oil drops should not be used if the eardrum has burst, and they will not help an ear infection.

If you or your child has an ear infection, you should avoid getting the affected ear wet.

Common causes of earache

The information below should not be used to self-diagnose your condition, but it may give you an idea as to what might be causing your earache.

It does not include every possible cause, but outlines some of the most common reasons for earache.

Ear infections

If the cause of earache is an ear infection, there may be a watery or pus-like fluid coming out of the ear.

[Outer ear infections](#) (infections of the tube connecting the outer ear and

eardrum) and [middle ear infections](#) (infections of the parts of the ear behind the eardrum) are very common causes of earache. Many ear infections clear up on their own without treatment in a few days or weeks, but in some cases your GP may prescribe eardrops or [antibiotics](#).

Read more about [treating outer ear infections](#) and [treating middle ear infections](#)

Glue ear

Glue ear (also known as otitis media with effusion, or OME) is a build-up of fluid deep inside the ear, which commonly causes some temporary [hearing loss](#). The condition tends to be painless, but sometimes the pressure of this fluid can cause earache.

Glue ear will often clear up on its own, although this can take a few months. If the problem is particularly persistent, a minor procedure to place small tubes called grommets in the ear may be recommended to help drain the fluid. Read more about [treating glue ear](#)

Damage to the ear

Earache can sometimes result from injury to the inside of the ear – for example, by scraping earwax from the ear canal using a cotton bud, or poking a cotton bud too far into your ear, which can puncture the eardrum. The ear canal is very sensitive and can easily become damaged. The ear should heal on its own without treatment, but it can take up to two months for a perforated eardrum to heal. If you have a perforated eardrum, eardrops shouldn't be used.

Earwax or an object in the ear

A build-up of [earwax](#) or an object stuck inside the ear can sometimes cause earache.

If there is something in your or your child's ear that seems to be causing pain, don't attempt to remove it yourself, as you may only push it further inside and you may damage the eardrum.

If you have a build-up of earwax in your ear, your pharmacist will be able to recommend eardrops to soften it so it falls out naturally. In some cases, your GP will need to remove the wax (once softened with eardrops) by flushing the ear with water. This is known as ear irrigation.

If there is an object in the ear, your GP may need to refer you or your child to a specialist to have it removed.