

# Allergies & Your Ears

Allergies can also affect your ears, hearing, and balance. This may occur if the swelling produced by an allergic reaction, effects the Eustachian tube. This tube is a connection between the middle ear and the back of the nose and upper throat. Its job is to drain excess fluid from the ear and equalize the pressure in the ears. During an allergic reaction, your body may produce excessive amounts of mucus that will not drain the Eustachian tube on its own.

## **Ear Pain/Pressure**

If the lining of the Eustachian tube becomes inflamed, then the ears may start to feel full and pop. In severe cases, allergies can cause the Eustachian tube to become completely blocked. This can cause pain as fluid accumulates behind the ear drum.

## **Middle Ear Infection**

If fluid buildup in the ears is not treated, an ear infection can develop. Allergies may play role in ear infections, a buildup of fluid behind the eardrum, or problems with uncomfortable ear pressure. Diagnosing and treating allergies is an important part of maintaining ear health.

Infants and children are at a higher risk of this allergy complication. Signs and symptoms common in children include:

Ear pain, especially when lying down	Loss of balance
Tugging or pulling at an ear	Fever of 100 F (38 C) or higher
Difficulty sleeping	Drainage of fluid from the ear
Crying more than usual	Headache
Acting more irritable than usual	Loss of appetite
Difficulty hearing or responding to sounds	

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Common signs and symptoms in adults include:

Ear pain

Drainage of fluid from the ear

Diminished hearing

Balance issues

See your health care provider as soon as possible if you or your child have drainage or bleeding from the ear, a fever, or severe ear pain.

## **Hearing Loss**

Fluid build-up in the ear due to allergies can also contribute to temporary hearing loss. This occurs because the fluid prevents the sound from being interpreted correctly by the ear. There may be significant hearing loss. A loss of hearing can also effect the ability to speak clearly, especially in small children.

Contact a physician if you or someone you know experiences any of the hearing loss symptoms listed below.

In adults, signs of hearing loss can include:

- Inattentiveness
  - Buzzing or ringing in the ears
  - Failure to respond to spoken words
  - Muffled hearing
  - Constant frustration hearing speech and other sounds
  - Avoiding conversation
  - Social isolation
  - Depression
- Balance issues

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In children, parents should watch for the following signs of hearing loss:

- Lack of attention to sounds
- Failure to follow simple directions
- Failure to respond when his/her name is called
- Delays in speech and language development
- Pulling or scratching at his/her ears
- Difficulty achieving academically, especially in reading and math
- Social isolation and feeling unhappy in school
- Persistent ear discomfort after exposure to loud noise (regular and constant listening to electronics at high volumes)

## **Dizziness/Vertigo**

Since the ears play a role in maintaining balance, inflammation can lead to a loss of balance, dizziness and even vertigo.

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## **Treating Allergy-Related Ear Problems**

A warm compress. Placing a warm, moist washcloth over the affected ear may lessen pain.

**Pain medication.** Your doctor may advise the use of over-the-counter acetaminophen or ibuprofen to relieve ear pain. Use the drugs as directed on the label.

**Eardrops.** Prescription anesthetic eardrops, may provide additional pain relief for those whose ear drums are intact (not torn or perforated).  
**Antibiotics.** Your doctor may recommend antibiotic treatment for a middle ear infection caused by bacteria.

**Ear Tubes.** If your child has recurrent middle ear infections, your doctor may recommend a procedure to drain fluid from the middle ear. During an outpatient surgical procedure, a surgeon creates a tiny hole in the eardrum that enables him or her to suction fluids out of the middle ear. A tiny tube is placed in the opening to help ventilate the middle ear and prevent the accumulation of more fluids. Some tubes are intended to stay in place for three months to a year and then fall out on their own. Other tubes are designed to stay in longer and may need to be surgically removed.

**Allergy Treatment.** Treating the underlying allergic reaction that is affecting the Eustachian tube can help prevent ear problems in the future.