

Ear Infections

Contributed by Dr. Paul G. Jensen

Ear infections are the most common reason doctors prescribe antibiotics for outpatients in this country.

Because of the increasing problem with bacterial resistance to antibiotics, many studies have been done to evaluate the effectiveness of antibiotic therapy for ear infections.

After an extensive evaluation of 7 different randomized-blinded studies comparing antibiotics with placebos, a research paper published in the British Medical Journal¹ concluded that treating ear infections with antibiotics did not make any significant difference in the outcome.

With this compelling evidence against not using antibiotics for ear infections, why then do doctors continue to prescribe them? The rationale is to prevent mastoiditis and meningitis. But a Netherlands study that was cited in this same research paper refutes this rationale. This large study was done on 4860 consecutive patients. All had ear infections but were not given antibiotics. Of the 4860 patients not given antibiotics, only 2 experienced mastoiditis (both of these responded promptly to antibiotic therapy) and none of the 4860 developed meningitis.

As a result of this 1985 study, the Netherlands medical doctors no longer routinely prescribe antibiotics for ear infections. If the Dutch have been successfully treating ear infections for over 10 years without the use of potentially harmful antibiotic therapy, why then aren't American medical doctors following their example?

When I was a student in Chiropractic College, one of my classmate's children had been having severe ear infections for several months with poor results from using antibiotics. The child began to show signs of toxicity from the ongoing antibiotic use, and was obviously at risk for developing antimicrobial resistance should she need antibiotics for a life threatening infection. Because of repeated eardrum ruptures (despite the use of tubes) my classmate was also very concerned that his daughter would have permanent hearing loss. It was suggested by one of our professors to use a homeopathic remedy. We were amazed at how well the remedy worked. As a result of the success of that remedy, my own children and many of my other classmate's children never again used antibiotics to treat ear infections. I have been doing the same with my patient's since I began practice in 1984 and have never had even one complication from not recommending antibiotic therapy for ear infections.

¹ British Medical Journal July 1997 Volume 315: 98-102