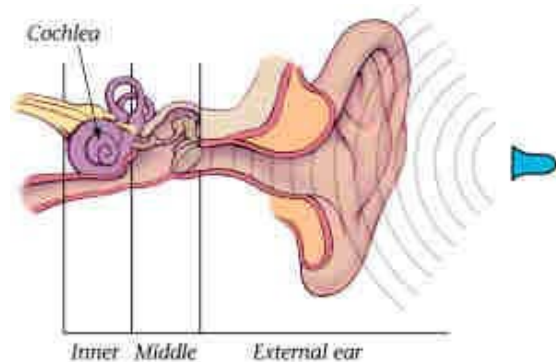


DO EAR INFECTIONS CAUSE HEARING LOSS?

Ear infections may occur in the middle ear. The middle ear begins at the eardrum. Behind the eardrum is the middle ear space, which is usually filled with air. This space contains the three tiny bones of the middle ear. This space also contains the opening of the Eustachian tube. This tube connects the middle ear space with the upper part of the throat.



Anything which interferes with the proper working of the middle ear is called a dysfunction. The most common dysfunction seen in children is an improperly working Eustachian tube. This tube opens and closes many times during the day, providing an exchange of air between the middle ear and the air around us. If the Eustachian tube does not open often enough, the middle ear pressure changes and fluid may fill the middle ear space. The fluid can become infected.

Middle ear dysfunction is a health problem that requires medical attention. If left untreated, it may result in hearing loss and communication problems. Hearing loss caused by middle ear dysfunction is called conductive hearing loss. This type of hearing loss is usually temporary, and hearing can be restored with appropriate medical treatment. The amount of hearing loss varies from person to person and may even change from day to day.

If middle ear dysfunction results in long-standing or repeated episodes of conductive hearing loss, speech and language development may be delayed in children. It also can cause listening problems in daycare or school, as well as at home. In some cases, the hearing problems may be mistaken for behavioral problems such as poor attention or distractibility. Hearing test results should be shared with the child's daycare providers or teachers. The educators can create the best listening environment by minimizing background noise and having the child sit close to the teacher. They should also gain the child's attention before talking to him/her and before changing topics.

If you suspect that you or your child has middle ear dysfunction or conductive hearing loss, get prompt medical attention. A hearing test, ear examination, and a history of ear problems are used by the doctor to create a medical treatment plan. Follow the medical treatment plan and recommendations for follow-up, which may include retesting your child's hearing to make sure that it has returned to normal.