

# Patient information from BMJ

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## How to help your child avoid ear infections

**Taking certain steps might lower your child's chance of ear infections. There hasn't been enough research to show for certain that these things work, but they might be worth trying.**

- Don't smoke near your child, and make sure no one else does either. Exposing your child's ears to cigarette smoke may increase the chance of ear infections.
- Try to keep your child away from other children who have colds or other infections whenever possible.
- Make sure your child washes hands frequently, particularly before eating.
- If you're pregnant or you've just had a baby, consider breastfeeding your newborn, even for just a few months. Breastfeeding rather than bottle-feeding seems to lower a child's chance of ear infections in the years to come.
- If you bottle-feed, try not to let your child use a bottle lying down. Babies who drink from a bottle lying down seem to get ear infections more often.
- If your child has an allergy, try to remove the thing that triggers an allergic reaction, such as animal hair. Some research has shown that allergies are linked to ear infections. (An allergy happens when the body's immune system overreacts to a substance that's usually harmless, such as pollen.)
- Make sure your child's immunisations are up to date.

It's not clear from the research whether sucking a dummy can increase the chance of ear infections. There might be a risk for children who are prone to these infections. If your child gets lots of ear infections and is over 1 year old, it might be worth trying to wean your child off his or her dummy.

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