Ear Infection (Adult)

Have you been struggling with ear pain, discharge, or hearing changes? Ear infections are very common. While many resolve quickly, others can cause significant discomfort or lead to complications if left untreated.

At Birmingham Head and Neck Clinic, our ENT consultants are here to provide fast, expert diagnosis and treatment for all types of ear infections. Whether it's a one-off issue or part of a recurring pattern, we'll help you feel better and protect your long-term ear health.

What Is An Ear Infection?

An ear infection occurs when bacteria or viruses cause inflammation in the ear. There are different types, depending on which part of the ear is affected:

- **Outer ear infections** (otitis externa) affect the ear canal and are often known as "swimmer's ear"
- **Middle ear infections** (otitis media) involve the area behind the eardrum
- **Inner ear infections** (labyrinthitis or vestibular neuritis) are less common but can cause dizziness and balance problems

Ear infections can be acute (sudden and short-lived) or chronic (long-lasting or recurrent).

Signs And Symptoms

The symptoms of an ear infection depend on the type and severity but may include:

- Ear pain or discomfort
- A feeling of fullness or pressure in the ear
- Discharge or fluid leaking from the ear
- Temporary hearing loss
- Itching or redness in the outer ear
- Fever or general feeling of being unwell
- Dizziness, vertigo, or balance issues (with inner ear infections)

If you experience any of these symptoms, especially if they persist or are severe, it's best to see a specialist.

What Causes Ear Infections?

Ear infections may be caused by:

- Viral or bacterial infections (often following a cold or sore throat)
- Water trapped in the ear canal
- Allergies
- Build-up of wax or skin debris
- Narrow or poorly draining ear canals
- Use of earphones, cotton buds, or hearing aids
- Eustachian tube dysfunction

Some people are more prone to ear infections, including swimmers, and those with eczema.

When To Seek Help

Many mild ear infections clear up on their own, but you should see a specialist if:

- Symptoms last more than a few days
- Pain or discharge is severe
- Your hearing is affected
- You have recurrent infections
- You experience dizziness or balance problems
- You develop swelling around the ear or fever

Prompt assessment helps prevent complications and offers relief from persistent symptoms.

How We Diagnose Ear Infections

At Birmingham Head and Neck Clinic, you'll be seen by a consultant ENT specialist. Your assessment may include:

- A careful review of your symptoms and history
- Examination of the ear using an otoscope or microscope
- Swab or fluid analysis (if discharge is present)
- Hearing tests (audiometry or tympanometry)
- Further imaging if a more complex issue is suspected

Treatment Options

Treatment will depend on the type and cause of your ear infection. Options may include:

- **Ear drops or topical antibiotics** for outer ear infections
- **Oral antibiotics** for more severe or middle ear infections

- **Cleaning of the ear canal** (aural toilet or microsuction)
- **Pain relief and anti-inflammatory medication**
- **Treatment of underlying issues** such as allergies or nasal congestion
- **Grommet insertion** for adults with frequent middle ear infections or glue ear
- **Surgical treatment** in rare cases, such as for chronic infection or mastoiditis

We will explain your diagnosis clearly and develop a personalised plan to get you better, fast.

What To Expect At Your Appointment

You'll be seen by a consultant ENT surgeon with extensive experience in managing ear conditions. We'll take time to listen, examine your ears thoroughly, and recommend the best course of action. Our goal is to ease your discomfort, protect your hearing, and prevent future problems.

Get In Touch

If you think you may have an ear infection – or you've had several recently – don't wait for it to get worse. Effective treatment is available, and early care can prevent complications.

Contact Birmingham Head and Neck Clinic today to book your consultation with an ENT specialist.