

Pulling at Ear

Why do children pull or poke their ears?

Most young children who are pulling at or poking their ears but have no other symptoms do not have an ear infection. Many of them have an itchy ear canal from getting soap or shampoo in it. Some have just discovered their ears and are playing with them (6 months to 2 years old). If the behavior occurs only when your child is sleepy, it may be a self-comforting habit.

How can I take care of my child?

• Treatment

Mix a solution that is half rubbing alcohol and half white vinegar. Place one to two drops in each ear daily for 3 days.

• Prevention

- Keep soap and shampoo out of the ear canal.
- Don't use cotton swabs in the ear canal because they remove the earwax that protects the lining of the canal and this can cause irritation or itching.
- After swimming, get all water out of the ear canals by turning the head to the side and pulling the earlobe in different directions to help the water run out.

When should I call my child's health care provider?

Call within 24 hours if:

- Your child develops ear pain.
- A discharge from the ear occurs.
- Your child develops a fever (over 100°F, or 37.8°C) or any signs of a cold.
- Pulling at the ear continues more than 3 days.
- You have other concerns or questions.

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This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.