

The Truth  *About Health*

ANTIBIOTICS: A SOLUTION OR A PROBLEM?

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Prior to the antibiotic era, roughly 80% of all ear infections resolved spontaneously. Today, nearly 9 out of 10 children diagnosed with otitis media will receive an antibiotic. Yet, according to M.M. Paparella, MD, "Otitis media with effusion (fluid)...appears to be more common since the widespread use of antibiotics."

This increase is alarming because of evidence that antibiotics are not wholly effective in treating children with otitis media. A study of 3,660 children in nine countries found that antibiotics had little impact on the rate of recovery from otitis media.

It has been found that thirty to fifty percent of children with otitis media harbor no harmful bacteria in the middle ear. This suggests that a considerable number of children who take antibiotics for otitis media do so unnecessarily. Unfortunately it is very difficult to do a culture to determine if bacteria is present.

Doctors tend to assume bacteria is present and prescribe antibiotics even when there is no evidence of bacteria.

Antibiotics have been credited with saving countless lives that might otherwise have been lost to infection. On the other hand, antibiotics are being linked with a growing number of adverse conditions. Antibiotic overuse is also associated with a raise in the number of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

Antibiotics are life-saving drugs when used in life-threatening situations. Yet, when used repeatedly for minor, uncomplicated illnesses, antibiotics can seriously undermine the treatment of the diseases for which they are intended.

SOURCE: Article written by Michael A. Schmidt. *When Antibiotics Fail: Restoring the Ecology of the Body*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1986. Study on Otitis Media: Diagnosis and Antibiotic Treatment of Acute Otitis Media: Report from International Primary Care Network, 1990.