

Antibiotics for acute middle ear infection in children

The numbers here are from studies that looked at children aged 0 to 15 with an acute middle ear infection who were given either antibiotics or “fake pills” (placebos) for 1 to 2 weeks.

	100 children who took fake pills	100 children who took antibiotics
Benefits		
How many children felt pain 4 to 7 days after the doctor’s diagnosis?	24	18
How many children were told 2 to 4 weeks after the diagnosis that they may have hearing problems?	48	40
How many children had a ruptured eardrum because of the infection?	5	2
Harms*		
How many children had unpleasant symptoms such as vomiting, diarrhea, or rash?	20	27

*Using antibiotics too much may make bacteria resistant to antibiotics. This means that antibiotics lose their ability to kill bacteria or to slow them down in spreading. An especially big problem is when bacteria change genetically so that antibiotics are no longer as effective.

Short summary: Children who took antibiotics had less pain, hearing problems, and ruptured eardrums. However, after taking antibiotics they had unpleasant symptoms such as vomiting, diarrhea, and rashes.