

Caring for your child's hearing

Hearing helps children learn, communicate, and connect with the world. When ear problems are missed, even for a short time, they can become barriers to learning and wellbeing.

Parents, caregivers and teachers play a vital role in a child's hearing care.

Watch for the signs

Some children with hearing difficulties may:

- Not respond when spoken to.
- Seem distracted or inattentive.
- Struggle to follow instructions.
- Need repetition or increased volume.



Why it matters

Early recognition makes a big difference. A hearing test can identify if hearing is affected and what might be causing it. There is always something that can be done – and early action works.

What to do

If you're concerned, talk to your GP or Well Child Tamariki Ora provider about a hearing check.

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Act early

Smelly, painful or leaky ears are **not normal**.

Signs that action is needed include:

- Ear pain
- Discharge (watery, thick, or smelly)
- Itching or blocked sensation
- Reduced hearing
- Fever, irritability, poor sleep or feeding



Why it matters

Ear discharge usually means infection or inflammation. Without treatment, this can damage the ear and affect hearing – especially in busy learning environments. Repeated or long-lasting infections can impact speech, language, learning, behaviour, and social development.

What to do

If a child has smelly or leaky ears, they need to see their GP as soon as possible. Early treatment protects hearing and prevents long-term problems.

Look after ears every day

Simple daily habits help protect hearing:

Keep ears dry

Dry gently after swimming or bathing. Don't put objects into the ear canal.

Support healthy noses

A blocked nose can stop ears from draining properly. Encourage gentle nose blowing (one side at a time) and 'blow, don't sniff'.

Handwashing matters

Good hygiene reduces the spread of colds and flu that can lead to ear infections.

Keep immunisations up to date

Vaccines protect against infections that can harm hearing, including measles, meningitis and pneumococcal disease.

Protect ears from loud sounds

Loud noise can permanently damage hearing. Use device volume limits, encourage quiet breaks and be mindful of noisy toys and environments.



Good hearing
is taonga –
protecting it early
gives children the
strongest possible
start in life.

By watching for the signs, acting early and supporting everyday ear health, parents, caregivers and teachers help children learn, connect and thrive.