



cheers to ears

You wash behind them and sing lullabies to them.

You tickle, kiss, and coo into them too. Learn how to keep your baby's listeners clean, spot an infection, and ensure they're hearing every sweet word you say to her.

What's Normal

WAX Yellow, orange, brown, even black—earwax comes in a myriad of colors. Whatever the shade, wax is a good thing: It's the body's way to prevent foreign particles from entering the ears, says Zoey Goore, M.D., a pediatrician in Roseville, California. If you try to

clean it out, you may push the wax farther in or damage the ear canal. Instead of using cotton swabs, Dr. Goore recommends gently wiping the inside of the ear with a wet washcloth during bathtime. If the wax seems excessive, see your pediatrician, who may remove it with a special tool or use a few drops of mineral oil to help dissolve it.

UNUSUAL SMELLS Though an ear infection can sometimes cause an odor, the culprit is more likely breast milk or formula that escapes during mealtime and dribbles behind (or even into) the ears. Washed your baby's ears but still smell something funny? See your doc to rule out an infection.

FUNNY SHAPES Pointy tips. Big lobes. Ears come in all shapes and sizes, and sometimes stick out too. While they continue to grow, their form usually stays the same, says D.J. Verret, M.D., clinical assistant professor of otolaryngology—head and neck surgery, at University of Texas Southwestern Medical School, in Plano. In most cases, the shape of your newborn's ears won't impact her hearing. However, if you're concerned, Dr. Verret recommends seeing an ear, nose, and throat doctor for ear molds that infants can wear in the first few weeks to adjust shape and fix protrusion without surgery.

What To Watch Out For

DISCHARGE White, yellow, or blood-tinged pus from the ear is not normal and can signal an infection, ruptured eardrum, or injury, says Dr. Verret. See your pediatrician right away to determine the cause.

PAIN Teething, middle ear infections, swimmer's ear (an infection of the ear canal), and even aggressive cleaning can cause pain. But until a child can point to or tell you what hurts, you may not know she's uncomfortable, says Dr. Goore. If she pulls at her ears, is irritable when lying down or sucking, and is generally fussy, she may be hurting. Take her to the pediatrician if symptoms persist for two days.



HEAR THIS!

For more advice on how to prevent and treat your baby's ear infections, check out americanbaby.com/earinfections