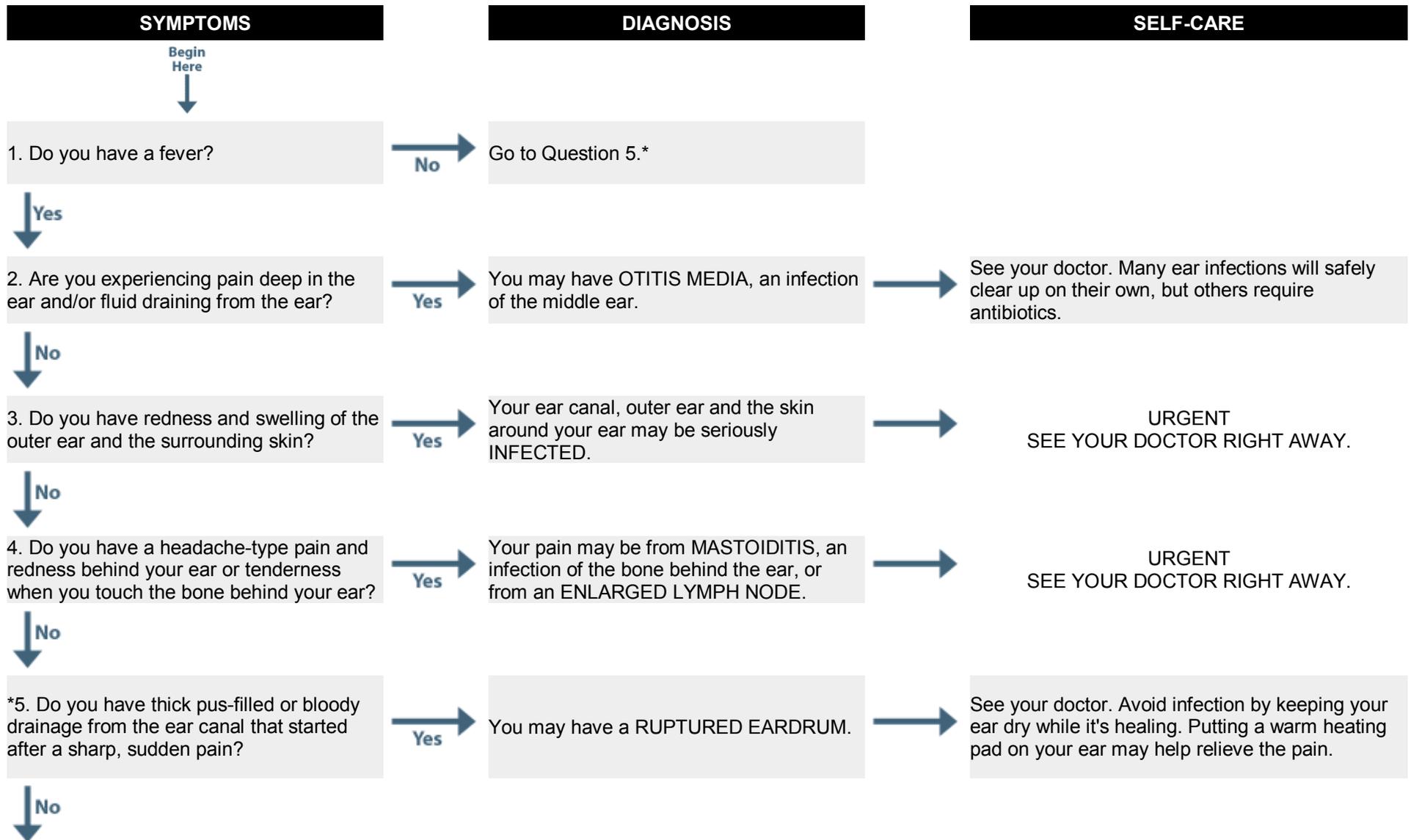


Ear Problems

Ear problems are often caused by an infection. However, other conditions may also cause ear pain or discomfort. Follow this chart for more information about ear problems.



6. Is your ear swollen, and does it itch or hurt when you pull on your ear or earlobe?

Yes

Your pain may be caused by [OTITIS EXTERNA](#), an infection of the ear canal that is also called swimmer's ear.

See your doctor. Keep your ear dry while it's healing. Putting a warm heating pad over your ear may help relieve the pain.

You can prevent swimmer's ear by placing 3 to 5 drops of a half-alcohol, half-white vinegar solution in the ear before and after swimming or taking showers.

No

7. Does your jaw joint "crack" when you chew or open your mouth, or do you feel tenderness in your jaw?

Yes

TEMPOROMANDIBULAR JOINT (TMJ) SYNDROME, a disorder that affects the jaw joint, may be the source of your pain.

Try an anti-inflammatory medicine. Try massaging the sore muscles around your jaw. Moist heat or cold packs may also help relieve the pain.

If there's no improvement in a week or 2, see your dentist or doctor. If you're experiencing severe pain or you can't open your jaw, see your doctor right away.

No

8. Do you hear fluid in your ear, and feel pressure or stuffiness that can't be cleared with coughing, yawning or swallowing, and do you have cold or flu symptoms?

Yes

Your ear discomfort may be caused by a [BLOCKED EUSTACHIAN TUBE](#). Colds and the flu often lead to this condition.

Try an over-the-counter decongestant medicine for a few days. Putting a warm heating pad on your ear may help relieve the pain.

If the pain is intense or doesn't go away in 1 or 2 days, see your doctor.

No

9. Do you have tooth pain on the same side as the ear pain when you bite down?

Yes

A tooth problem can radiate pain to the ear on the same side.

Try a mild over-the-counter pain reliever, and see your dentist.

No

10. Did your ear pain start during an airplane flight or right after you traveled on an airplane?

Yes

You may have [BAROTRAUMA](#), also called airplane ear, which is caused by changes in altitude and air pressure.

If your symptoms don't improve in a few hours or if the pain is severe, see your doctor.

No

11. Can you see or feel a "pimple" in the ear canal?



A small INFECTION in the ear canal may be the cause.



The infection will probably go away by itself in 2 to 5 days. A mild pain reliever and warm compresses may help relieve the pain.

See your doctor if the pain becomes severe or if redness and warmth spread into the ear.



12. Is the affected person a child who doesn't have ear pain or redness but is having problems hearing?



This may be caused by a buildup of fluid (SEROUS OTITIS) or a buildup of wax in the ear canal (CERUMINOSIS).



Talk to your doctor. He or she can tell you how to treat the wax or fluid buildup.



For more information, please talk to your doctor. If you think your problem is serious, call your doctor right away.

This tool has been reviewed by doctors and is for general educational purposes only. It is not a substitute for medical advice. The information in this tool should not be relied upon to make decisions about your health. Always consult your family doctor with questions about your individual condition(s) and/or circumstances. Source: American Academy of Family Physicians. Family Health & Medical Guide. Dallas: Word Publishing; 1996.