

Healthy Solutions—RX: Massage away your child's ear infections

By Amy Mayer

If ear infections turn your beautiful child into a cranky, irritable toddler, try giving her lymphatic massage. A gentle but specific touch, this type of massage helps stimulate mucus so it drains, says naturopathic doctor Amy Rothenberg of Enfield, Connecticut. You begin at the front of the neck near the collar bone and work on the lymph channels that run up either side of the neck. Use a circular motion as you follow along the lymph node channel until you reach the jaw, and then, says Rothenberg, you should switch to a downward motion. The process clears the mucus that builds up during infection and may bring relief to your child through the parent-satisfying act of physical contact. And lymphatic massage is kid-friendly.

"Most babies and toddlers really like having this procedure," Rothenberg says. She teaches parents the precise technique when they have a baby with chronic middle ear infections.

"You need to be shown how to do lymphatic massage," Rothenberg says, adding that it's safe and easy to learn. And once it's in your toolkit, you can use it on family members of any age to relieve nasal and sinus congestion as well as ear infections.

Gayle Mya Breman saw her daughter through three sets of surgically-placed ear tubes.

"When I learned that I could have avoided that with lymphatic drainage, I was guilt-ridden for a year," says Breman, now a licensed massage therapist who teaches lymphatic drainage therapy—a specific form of lymphatic massage—through the Upledger Institute in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida.

Breman's granddaughter also has ear problems, but the three-year-old has avoided tubes. Breman says two lymphatic drainage therapy sessions will keep her granddaughter's ears and lungs clear for up to six months. The treatment works on the premise that mucosa, or the mucus membrane, is too thick and isn't able to move within the lymphatic system the way it's supposed to, she says.

"When you use lymphatic drainage therapy...you're literally thinning down this fluid," She explains, and that allows blockages in the lymphatic system to open so everything again flows properly. "I love lymphatic work because I see results with it every day."

Rothenberg emphasizes lymphatic massage is one piece of the treatment puzzle for chronic ear infections. "I'm going to be using it in conjunction with several other approaches," she says. About a decade ago she met a two-year-old who'd already battled eight ear infections. "They always presented in the same way," she says. The child became irritable and hard to console, she grabbed at her ear and ran a low-grade fever. Since one of the parents had a dairy allergy, Rothenberg recommended removing dairy from the girl's diet, giving her vitamin C and an herbal immune booster, and stimulating drainage using lymphatic massage. "She never had another ear infection," Rothenberg says. With lymphatic massage, you may find that the touch of your own fingers on your baby's neck stimulates healing—and comforts both parent and child.