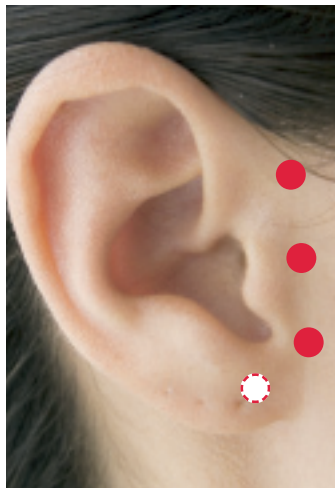


mend an ear

ONE REWARD OF ADULTHOOD is leaving childhood maladies like earaches behind. But for some, these pesky infections persist. For fast relief, press a heating pad against your ear to ease pain and promote drainage, says Los Angeles acupuncturist Julie Chambers, L.Ac. For more enduring comfort, try one of these antibiotic-free remedies. While supporting research focuses on children, natural remedies like herbal ear drops and homeopathy are equally effective for adults, says Mindy Boxer, Ph.D., L.Ac., a Santa Monica, Calif., homeopath. —Elizabeth Barker



	HERBAL EAR DROPS	ACUPRESSURE	HOMEOPATHY
what			
why	The herbs garlic and mullein possess antibacterial and anti-inflammatory properties that can help tame infection.	Using only your fingertips, you can ease discomfort with a simple technique; it's especially useful for earaches caused by tooth and jaw problems, wax buildup, or neuralgia.	Just as a vaccine helps ward off winter flu, homeopathy treats ear infection symptoms with a highly diluted version of a substance that causes similar symptoms.
evidence	In a 2003 study published in the journal <i>Pediatrics</i> , children treated with herbal ear drops (containing garlic and mullein, calendula, St. John's wort, and lavender) recovered faster from middle ear infections than those who received both ear drops and antibiotics.	"Acupressure stimulates blood and qi [energy] flow in the channels that circle the ear," explains Chambers. Enhancing circulation helps bring balance to the body, reducing pain and restoring normal function.	Reviewing homeopathy's effects on 75 kids with middle ear infections, researchers from the University of Washington in Seattle discovered that those who were given individualized homeopathic remedies instead of a placebo had a significant reduction in symptoms.
caveats	Don't use drops if the eardrum is perforated or fluid is draining from the ear, cautions Gina Haber, L.Ac., an acupuncturist in Pasadena, Calif. (If your child is the patient, consult his or her pediatrician.)	By Western standards, the evidence is anecdotal. Clinical trials have yet to be performed to determine acupressure's efficacy for earaches.	Eating, drinking, brushing your teeth, or chewing gum within 20 minutes of using a homeopathic remedy may weaken its effectiveness, Boxer warns.
using it	Place two warm drops in the affected ear three times a day, Haber suggests. An herbalist or naturopath can create a formula for you, or purchase a ready-made blend such as Wise Woman Herbs Ear Drop Oil (with mullein, garlic, and calendula; \$8 for 0.5 ounces; www.mountainroseherbs.com).	One at a time, press the three points where your ear meets your face and the point directly behind your ear lobe. Alternate between points, gently but firmly massaging for a total of about 10 minutes.	The right remedy varies according to symptoms. Belladonna can ease throbbing accompanied by fever; pulsatilla relieves a feeling of pressure behind the eardrum; and Kali muriaticum is best for infections that occur with nasal congestion and swollen glands. Hyland's Earache Tablets (\$10.50; www.drugstore.com) contain belladonna, pulsatilla, and other helpful substances.

FROM LEFT: COURTESY WISE WOMAN HERBALS; CARRIE PROPHETT; JEFF HARRIS