

Appendix 3

Swimming - A Cause of Ear Infections?

By John Bainbridge

There has been much discussed and spoken about swimming and ear infections by parents, relatives, and the medical profession. A lot of the statements are erroneous to the point of been ridiculous.

My opinion is based on 30 years of working with children in the water, speaking and attending numerous aquatic conferences in Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Canada, Mexico and of course the USA. At these conferences there is nearly always a representative of the medical field who supports the statement that swimming does not cause middle or inner ear infections.

There is an outer ear infection, commonly called "swimmers ear" that can be caused by poorly kept pools and water. This is some what like the fungus infection that occurs between the toes. This is easily treated by drops from over the counter, is not common in properly chlorinated pools, and is not the ear problems that we are addressing here.

The middle and inner ear infections that occur in young children are usually a result of a cold or throat infection that travels up the Eustachian tube to the moist air pocket behind the ear drum. Young children are more prone to this infection as the angle of the Eustachian tube is such that it promotes easy access to this moist pocket of air where the bacteria and viruses can breed without coming in contact with too much of the body's immune system. As the child grows the angle of the tube changes and the infection has less of a chance surviving and getting to the ear.

A young child or infant, that swims on a regular basis (at least once a week), will be stronger and healthier than a child who does not swim. The swimming child will have a stronger immune system and the cold or throat infection will have less chance of surviving and causing a middle or inner ear infection.