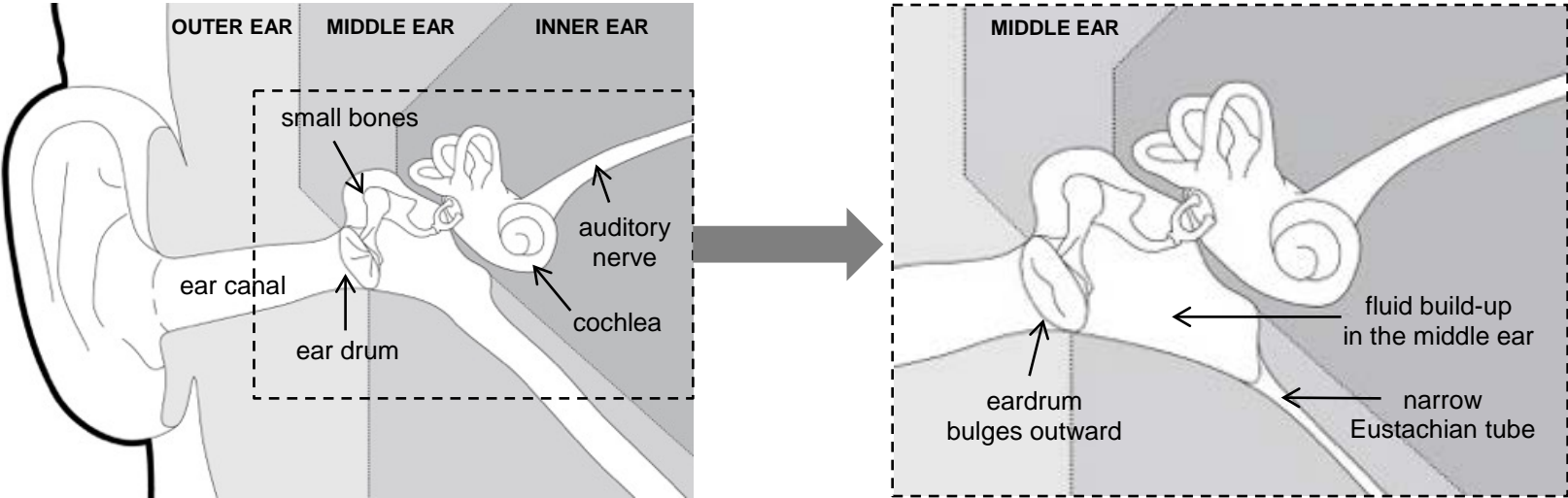


Middle ear infection (Acute otitis media)



How the parts of the ear work

1. Sound waves (vibrations) travel through the ear canal to the eardrum.
2. The eardrum passes the vibrations to 3 small bones in the middle ear.
3. The small bones pass the vibrations to the cochlea in the inner ear.
4. Inside the cochlea, the vibrations are changed into electrical signals.
5. The auditory (hearing) nerve sends the signals to the brain, which tells you what the sound is.

What happens with a middle ear infection

1. Swelling (often from a cold) narrows or blocks the Eustachian tube.
2. Fluid builds up in the middle ear.
3. Germs multiply in the fluid and cause an infection.
4. The build-up of fluid and pus pushes the eardrum outwards.

Most mild ear infections are caused by viruses and will get better without antibiotics.

For more information, read "[Watchful waiting: A good way to treat your child's mild ear infection](#)"