

Otalgia

Primary Care Management Guidelines for GPs

These guidelines are to assist GPs to monitor and manage their patients in a primary care setting until clinical thresholds indicate that tertiary care is required. The clinical thresholds are defined in the guidelines, and may require diagnostic support from a local optometrist or ophthalmologist. Providing a detailed diagnostic report will assist with the triage of your referral into the most appropriate clinic, within clinically appropriate timeframes.

Primary care management

Management	Rationale / Detail
<p>Note history of otological signs and symptoms in addition to otalgia. These may include hearing loss, otorrhoea, vertigo, tinnitus, ear canal oedema, inflamed tympanic membrane, middle ear effusion, or tender inflamed mastoid process.</p> <p>Following diagnostic evaluation, manage appropriately for suggestive condition e.g. acute otitis media, acute otitis externa.</p>	<p>Presence of associated otological symptoms and signs suggests higher likelihood of otological aetiology. The majority of these may be managed in the primary care setting</p>
<p>No co-existent otological signs and symptoms.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associated with hoarseness, dysphagia, odynophagia, weight loss, appetite loss. If symptoms persistent beyond 2 weeks – refer • Associated with tooth ache, percussion tenderness, and dental caries – arrange dental review • Associated with acute ENT conditions eg acute tonsillitis, sinusitis – manage primary acute condition • Associated with cervical arthritic change – arrange orthopaedic / physiotherapy review • Associated with temporo-mandibular joint (TMJ) tenderness, crepitus on movement – arrange dental/maxilla-facial review to exclude TMJ dysfunction 	<p>This may suggest otalgia referred from alternate site.</p> <p>If otalgia suggestive of referred aetiology but persists despite management by other specialties, arrange to ENT review to exclude co-existing occult head pathology.</p>

Primary Care Management

- Recommend ocular lubricants and/or lubricating ointments to relieve symptoms and review annually to monitor progress.
- Remind patients there is no cure for this condition and treatment is long term to provide relief of symptoms.

When to refer to the Eye and Ear

- Refer if unilateral otalgia persisting beyond 2 weeks especially if present in at risk groups of high alcohol intake and smokers. The primary concern is to identify pathology that is occult e.g. tongue base/laryngeal malignancy
- If associated with cranial nerve signs, refer to ENT AO (call switchboard 9929 8666) for same day review
- If otalgia suggestive of referred aetiology but persists despite management by other specialties, refer to exclude co-existing occult head pathology

Information to include on the referral letter

- History of present complaint, associated symptoms and risk factors
- Impact of symptoms
- Treatment to date

More information

Return to our [Primary Care Management Guidelines](#)

Go to our [Referral Guidelines](#)

A list of audiology services in Victoria can be found at [Audiology Australia](#)