

OTITIS EXTERNA

Otitis externa is inflammation of the external ear canal which can occur in dogs and cats. Ear infections that are left untreated cause permanent hearing loss, extreme discomfort, scarring of the ear canal, or may progress to an inner ear infection.

SIGNS

1. Rubbing or shaking the head; scratching at the ears
2. Redness, swelling, or pain when the ear is handled.
3. Any discharge or foul odor from the ears.
4. Head tilt, loss of balance or loss of appetite.

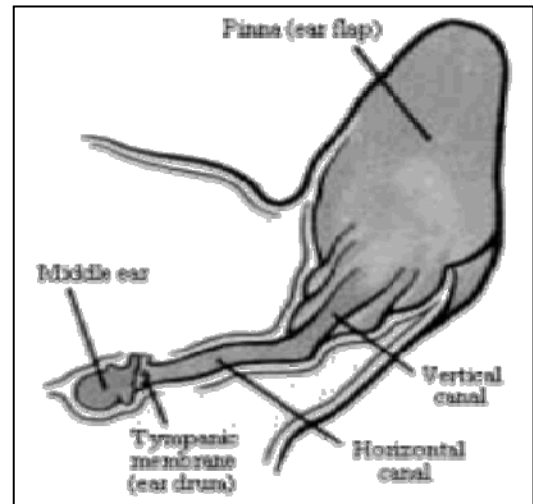
DIAGNOSIS / TREATMENT

By examining the ear and looking at an ear swab under a microscope, it can be determined if the ear infection is caused by yeast, bacteria, or ear mites.

YEAST -- Yeast are fungal organisms that can be found in a normal ear in small amounts. When the ear environment gets warm and wet, the yeast thrive and overgrow, causing extreme itching and a brown, waxy discharge. Yeast infections are most common in long eared dogs (Cocker and Springer Spaniels), and in dogs that are bathed or swim a lot (Labs or Golden Retrievers). Treating yeast involves antifungal agents and cleaning/drying the external ear environment.

BACTERIAL -- Bacterial infections are often seen in ears with large amounts of hair and wax accumulation (Poodles and Terriers). The exact type of bacteria and which antibiotic will be most effective can be determined by culturing an ear swab. Bacterial ear infections are treated with antibiotic drops and/or tablets, cleaning/drying the external ear and removing the excess wax and hair.

MITES -- Ear mites are small bugs that live in the ear canals of dogs and cats. They are easily spread to dogs and cats, so it is important to treat all animals that are exposed. A separate handout will be given if mites are present.



PREVENTION

1. Keep hair around ears clipped short and pluck hair in ears if needed. An ear powder is available to help pluck hair in the ears. If using a groomer, be sure they pluck the ears at each grooming.
2. Check the ears frequently for discharge redness, pain and odor. A healthy ear should not have an odor.
3. Clean ears with a Veterinarian approved ear cleaner. Fill the ears with solution, rub gently at the base of the ears, then wipe the ears out gently with a paper towel wrapped around your finger. Do NOT use Q-Tips deep in the ear. Use the cleaner as often as needed. If a large amount of discharge is present each time you clean, this may indicate a problem and you should have the ears examined by a veterinarian.
4. For long eared dogs or dogs who swim a lot, an ear drying solution is available to keep ears clean and dry. Use routinely 2-3 times per week or after a day of swimming.
5. Follow the directions for treatment once an ear infection is diagnosed and be sure to have the ears rechecked at the end of the treatment.

The most common cause of chronic or recurring ear infections is not treating long enough to completely eliminate the organism, or not changing the environment that allowed that organism to become established. The external ear canal is very long, and often the outer portion looks normal, while infection still exists further in. A follow up otoscopic exam is important to be sure the entire length of the ear canal is free of infection. Once the infection is under control, routine cleaning and drying will prevent recurrence of painful otitis externa.