



Otitis Externa

What is Otitis Externa?

Otitis Externa is inflammation of the outer ear canal. This may be accompanied by infection, but can be allergic only.

What causes Otitis Externa?

There are many possible causes. It can be as simple as a grass seed in the ear or an infection following water entering the ear after swimming or bathing. Ear infections may also be caused by ear mites or ear polyps. In many cases there may be more complicated underlying causes such as food allergies, atopic dermatitis, and environmental allergies.

How is Otitis Externa diagnosed?

Your vet will perform an ear exam and look for inflammation, grass seeds, polyps or other causes of ear inflammation. The vet will perform an ear swab to identify infectious organisms. A variety of organisms can be involved in ear infections, and the treatment will be modified based on the type of infection present.

How is Otitis Externa Treated?

The treatment will depend on the severity and type of infection.

If infection is severe with ear canals full of pus, or with Rod type organisms, it may be recommended to have the ear flushed under a sedation. This will result in most of the infection being removed for the ear, and will help medication to work better, and allow the infection to resolve faster. These animals will still need follow up medication, and a revisit to assess cure. In some severe infections, or infections that are not responding to medications, we may send a sample to the lab for culture to determine bacterial species and the best antibiotic.

In less severely affected animals it may be possible to manage with medications and ear cleaning at home.

Several medications may be prescribed for your dog's otitis. The most common treatment is a

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medicated ear drop. This medication will contain both cortisone and an antibiotic and antifungal chosen based on your dog's infection. If allergy without infection is present, treatment without antibiotics is more appropriate. Ear drops are much more effective than injections or tablets for treating ear infections.

Your dog may also be prescribed cortisone tablets if it is very painful and ear canal is swollen. This will improve pain levels and stop scratching, but does not resolve the infection. Very infrequently we may also prescribe tablet antibiotics.

Why is the recheck important?

A revisit is important to ensure that the infection has resolved. The cortisone will make your dog feel better, so the symptoms will stop within a few days. This does not mean infection is cured. A repeat ear smear 2 weeks after starting treatment is the best way to ensure that the infection is cured. Many dogs do require a longer course of treatment, and in very severe cases 6-12 weeks of treatment may be needed.

Why is the infection back?

There are 2 reasons that your dog's ear infection may keep coming back

1. The infection was not treated for long enough, was not rechecked, and the infection never went away. In these cases a cure may occur if we treat for longer and ensure we have repeat visits every 2-3 weeks until the infection is gone.
2. There is an underlying skin or ear anatomy problem that creates a good environment for infection to restart. If underlying conditions are suspected to be contributing to the cause of your dog's ongoing or recurring ear infections this will be discussed with you at the time of your consultation