

## Infections (Otitis Externa)

The dog's ear canal has a vertical and a horizontal section, which predisposes dogs to ear infections as secretions and debris must work its way upward rather than straight out.

Ear disease usually stems from over-production of wax, which occurs in response to irritation. Allergic skin disease affecting the ears is the most common cause, especially in recurring cases; other causes of ear infections include mites; foreign bodies such as grass seeds; or hair growth deep in the canal, which is especially common in poodles and schnauzers.

The moisture of the wax promotes yeast and bacterial growth and infection. Soon wax in the ears is joined by pus. It isn't long before the pet is seen scratching at his ears, shaking his head or holding one ear slightly dropped. Discharge and odor may be noticeable to people. If the infection reaches the middle ear, affected animals may have a head tilt, a lack of balance, and unusual back-and-forth eye movements called nystagmus. Middle ear infections can also cause paralysis of the facial nerve, leading to a dropped appearance on that side of the face.

When a dog with uncomfortable ears shakes and scratches vigorously, a blood vessel in the earflap may rupture. This leads to bleeding into the tissues of the ear flap. The usual recommendation is to have the blood clots removed and to bandage and clean the ear under anesthesia. If the hematoma is not so big as to obstruct the ear canal (thus preventing medication from getting where it is supposed to go), you can forego surgery, but without surgery the ear may scar down into an abnormal appearance.

Most ear infections are cleared up simply with professional cleaning followed by medication at home. If there is only mild debris in the ear canals, simple disinfection and washing of the ear is adequate; however, in many cases, a full ear flush is needed to even examine the eardrum. For patient comfort, we recommend sedation for this procedure as the ears are sore and the instruments can be damaging if the pet jumps at the wrong time.

A sample of ear discharge is commonly examined under the microscope to assist in selecting medications for home use. After a couple of weeks of home treatment, the ear canals are rechecked to be sure the infection is gone. In most cases this completes treatment but for stubborn cases, we must proceed to the next step.

*Pseudomonas aeruginosa* is a specific species of bacteria that is resistant to almost every possible antibiotic. It is common for ear infections to recur and over time, many antibiotics are used. The unfortunate tendency is for most bacteria to be killed off, leaving infection with the very resistant and practically immortal - not to mention especially smelly and pus-causing - *Pseudomonas*.

Ear infections can be especially frustrating as they have the ability to draw out for months, even years, even with the best of treatment. It is important to have a logical approach, to know what sort of infection is in the ear, to do proper home care regularly, and to **have regular recheck appointments.**



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particularly stubborn ear infections or numerous  
fts to prevention, such as weekly ear disinfection,  
once the acute infection is eliminated.

Kind Regards,  
Scott and Chris