



## EAR DISEASE IN DOGS AND CATS

**Otitis** - Inflammation of the Ear

**Otitis Externa** – Inflammatory disease of the external ear canal

**Otitis Media** – Inflammatory disease of the middle ear

**Otitis Interna** – Inflammatory disease of the inner ear

**Otitis Externa** is the most frequently seen ear problem in dogs and cats. One common cause of otitis externa in cats are ear mites. Bite wounds through the ear canal, inflicted by another cat, which become infected and form an abscess draining into the ear canal also often results in otitis externa in a cat.

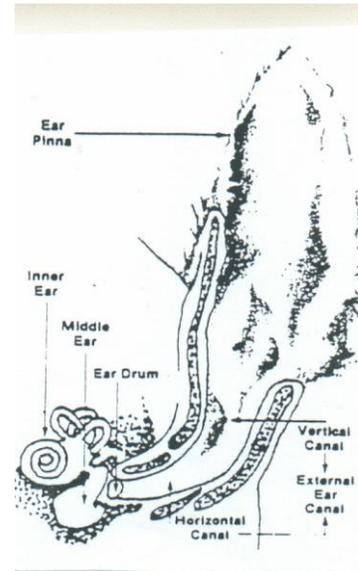
In dogs otitis externa occurs more commonly in poodles and terriers that have heavy hair growth in the ears, and also in dogs with drooping ears such as spaniels.

The causes of otitis externa are numerous and include anything that causes irritation to the ear canal, such as allergies, excessive ear wax, excessive moisture in the ear, bacterial infections, fungal infections such as yeast or ringworm, parasites such as mites or ticks, injuries, foreign bodies such as foxtails, poor ear drainage and even infections spreading from other areas of the body by the bloodstream.

Otitis externa may occur suddenly or be a chronic problem. The inside of the ear will appear red and swollen and sometimes ulcerated. It is painful and irritating and the dog will paw at the ear and shake its head, very often scratching until the ear lobe is raw and bleeding. A foul odor is usually associated with this problem as well.

In order to diagnose this problem, an examination of the ear canal with an otoscope is necessary. Depending on the temperament of your pet, it may be necessary to tranquilize or anesthetize your pet for this procedure. Aural cytology (evaluation of an ear swab under the microscope) is done to help determine the causative agent and the best modalities for treatment.

Following the diagnosis and initial cleaning, ointments are applied and sent home for further treatment. After applying the ointment into the ear canal, gently massage the outside of the ear and follow with a cotton ball to wipe the ear clean. If you use Q-tips for this, do not probe too deeply in the ear. It is the goal to work all debris and ointments outward from the ear canal. It is



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advisable to do this outside or in the garage as your pet will vigorously shake its head after treatment.

To help prevent recurring ear problems keep ears as clean and dry as possible. Before bathing your pet, put cotton in the ears to prevent moisture from getting into the ear. If your dog has excessive hair in the ear canal and is prone to ear infections, it will probably help to pluck the hair from the canal with tweezers every few weeks. Do not irritate the ears or pull on hair that does not come out readily; sometimes hair has to be clipped rather than pulled.

**Otitis media**, which is an inflammation of the middle ear is not encountered as frequently as otitis externa but is still relatively common in dogs. Many cases of otitis externa that are not treated eventually lead to this problem or it may occur alone from an ascending infection in the nose or throat, or from a disease elsewhere in the body via the bloodstream.

Treatment is similar to that used for otitis externa. Surgical procedures to open the ear drum, if it is not already perforated, to allow for drainage, or other types of drainage methods may be called for. Most ear drums heal when the condition clears up and even if they do not, dogs appear to hear very well without them.

**Otitis interna** is an inflammation of the inner ear and is a very serious medical problem. Here again the condition usually arises from a neglected external or middle ear infection.

The organs of hearing and equilibrium are involved and the signs therefore include loss of balance, tilting of the head, circling to the affected side, abnormal movements and falling over. These signs may also be seen in certain nervous system and brain disorders so it is not always possible to determine the problem at once.

**Hematoma** – If there is bleeding under the skin of the ear pinna from excessive shaking or because the animal has self-inflicted damage to the ear pinna, then blood may collect in this area. Treatment involves the draining of the blood and inserting special sutures. Although a hematoma may heal well without treatment there will be scarring and disfigurement without surgical or medical care.