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OTITIS EXTERNA (EAR INFECTIONS)

How common are ear infections in dogs?

Infection of the external ear canal by bacteria or yeast, is one of the most common types of infections seen in dogs. It is called **otitis externa**. Some breeds, particularly those with large or hairy ears like Cocker Spaniels and Poodles seem more prone to ear infections, but they can occur in any breed.

What are the symptoms of an ear infection?

A dog with an ear infection is uncomfortable and the ear canals are sensitive. The dog shakes its head and scratches its ears. The ears often become red and inflamed and develop an offensive odour. A black or brown discharge commonly occurs.

There are several kinds of bacteria and yeast which might cause an ear infection. Without knowing the kind of infection present, we do not know which medication to use. In some cases, the ear infection may be caused by a foreign body or tumour in the ear canal. Treatment with medication alone will not resolve these problems. Also, the dog must be examined to be sure that the eardrum is intact. Administration of certain medications can result in loss of hearing if the eardrum is ruptured.

What happens at the vets?

First, the ear canal is examined with an otoscope, an instrument that provides magnification and light. This permits a view of the ear canal. This examination allows us to determine whether the eardrum is intact and if there is any foreign material in the canal. When a dog is in extreme pain and refuses to allow the examination, it may be necessary to sedate or completely anaesthetise the dog for a thorough examination.

The next step is to examine a sample of the material from the ear canal under a microscope to determine which organism is causing the infection. Microscopic examination is very important in helping the veterinary surgeon choose the right medication to treat the inflamed ear canal. Furthermore, bacteriological culture may also be necessary before treatment is started.

How are ear infections treated?

The results of the otoscopic examination and bacteriology usually determine the course of treatment. If there is a foreign body or tick lodged in the ear canal, the dog is sedated or given a general anaesthetic so that it can be removed. As stated previously, some dogs have such a heavy buildup of debris that sedation or anaesthesia is needed to cleanse the canal and examine it completely. Cytologic study of debris from the ear canal dictates which drug to use. Sometimes, it reveals the presence of more than one type of infection (i.e., a bacterium and a fungus, or two kinds of bacteria); this situation usually requires the use of multiple medications or a broad-spectrum medication.

How important is it to treat an ear infection?

Dogs with ear infections are miserable. Their ears are a source of constant pain resulting in head shaking and scratching. However, that is not the only problem. Head shaking and scratching can also cause broken blood vessels in the ear flap, requiring surgery, and chronic ear infections can penetrate the ear drum and result in an internal ear infection.

Is there anything I need to know about getting medication in the ear? It is important to get the medication into the horizontal part of the ear canal. Be aware that the dog's external ear canal is "L" shaped. The vertical canal connects with the outside of the ear; the horizontal canal lies deeper in the canal and terminates at the eardrum.



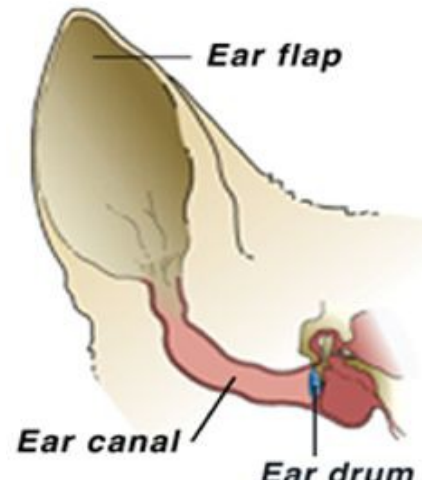
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The ear canal may be medicated by following these steps:

1. Gently pull the ear flap straight up and hold it with one hand
2. Insert the nozzle of the medication bottle or syringe into the ear canal
3. Apply the prescribed amount of medication into the vertical part of the ear canal while continuing to keep the ear flap elevated. Hold this position long enough for the medication to run down to the turn between the vertical and horizontal canal
4. Put your fingers and thumb around the firm cartilage that makes up the ear canal and massage, you should hear a squishing sound
5. Release the ear- be warned that the dog will shake its head! Some medication and debris may come out



If the vet prescribes an ear cleaner, this should be used at a minimum of 30 min prior to medicating the ear. After instilling the ear cleaner, clean the outer part of the ear canal and the inside of the ear flap with cotton wool. Ask any of our Vets to demonstrate to you, how to administer any medication you may be unsure of.