

Otitis Externa
(outer ear infection)

General Information

Otitis externa is an inflammation of the external ear canal that begins at the outside opening of the ear and extends inward to the eardrum. Causes include bacteria, fungi, ear mites, accumulation of wax, thick or matted hair in the ear canal, debris, impaired drainage of the ear, and infections from elsewhere in the body.

The ears of dogs (especially those with pendulous ears) and cats are ideal for the growth of bacteria and fungi because they are moist and warm, and contain wax and other debris. The funnel shape of the ear canal effectively traps debris, further complicating treatment of infections.

When ear infections are recurrent, the infection is likely secondary to a primary cause. Primary causes include atopy (environmental allergies), food allergies, hypothyroidism (dogs), Cushing's disease (dogs), Feline Leukemia (cats), and Feline Infectious Virus (cats).

Diagnosis

Ear cytology is used to microscopically determine if the infection is due to bacteria, yeast, or debris.

Oil immersion ear smears are used to check for ear mites.

Allergy blood tests (performed here) and intradermal skin tests (a dermatologist performs) can be used to check for atopy. A patient needs to be off antihistamines for at least two weeks and off any steroids for at least four weeks before performing the tests.

Food allergies are ruled-out using a six to twelve week hypoallergenic diet trial.

Blood tests can be used to evaluate a patient's health status for diseases that compromise the immune system such as hypothyroidism, Cushing's disease, Feline Leukemia, or Feline Infectious Virus.

Treatment

- 1) Clean the ear as follows: _____
Soak a cottonball in ear cleaner. Put the wet cottonball in the entry of the ear canal with half the cottonball in the vertical canal of the ear. Massage the base of the ear to fill the canal with ear cleaner to break down the earwax. Remove the cottonball. Allow your pet to shake their head to kick out the debris in the ears. Use a dry cottonball to wipe the outer ear clean.
- 2) Ear medication: _____
Follow the directions on the label.
- 3) Recheck in two weeks for a follow-up ear cytology and ear exam.
- 4) Oral medication: _____
Follow the directions on the label.
- 5) In hospital treatment: _____
This may include ear flushing, ear cleaning, or medication injections.
- 6) Food: _____
Please continue to feed your pet's regular food unless a diet trial is recommended above.

Notify Us at Saddleback Animal Hospital if Any of the Following Occurs:

You cannot medicate your pet's ear(s).
Your pet continually rubs, paws, or scratches its ear(s).
Your pet shows other signs of illness during treatment.
Your pet's infection recurs after apparent recovery.
If you have any questions, please contact us at (714)832-8686.