

EAR INFECTIONS

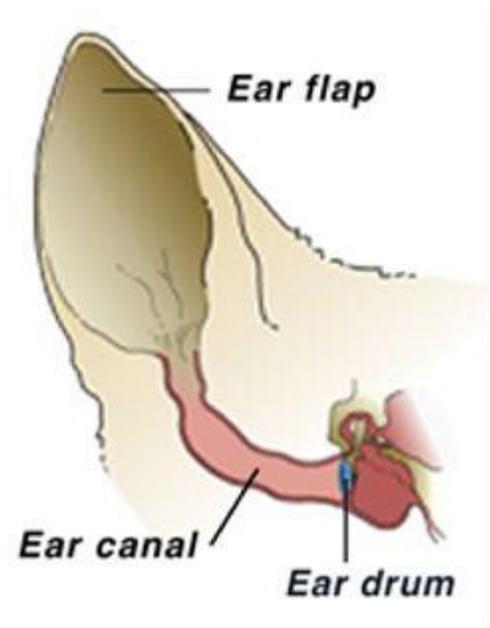
Our pets can get ear infections with bacteria or yeasts, usually because there is an underlying predisposing condition making the ear susceptible. These can include:

- Hair in the ear canal (esp. poodles, cocker spaniels and German Shepherds)
- Foreign bodies in the ear canal (e.g. Grass seeds, hair, fleas, insects)
- Excessively moist environment/humid warm weather (esp. dogs with droopy ears, and dogs that swim or are bathed regularly).
- Anatomical arrangement predisposes to infection (narrow and moist)
- Allergies to environmental factors (e.g. plants, house dust mites) or food (usually a protein)

Signs we usually see include:

- Head shaking and scratching at the ears with the paws
- Rubbing ears on the ground
- Discharge or noticeable smell from the ears
- Standing with one ear held down or head tilted
- Lethargic, depressed and restless

What can we do about infections?



The vet will examine your pet's ears with an Otoscope to see if there is any visible sign of infection and assess the state of the eardrum. The Otoscope allows examination of the whole ear canal, while we can only see about 20% of the total problem at the entrance to the ear. Also, if the ear drum has been damaged, some medications can be dangerous to use as they are toxic to the inner ear.

Some infections of the ear have distinctive smells which the vet may be able to recognise, but a smear of the ear discharge may also be taken and examined under the microscope to identify the type of infection present (type of bacteria, or yeast).

The antibiotic most likely to treat the infection will be prescribed, and if necessary, anti-inflammatory medications. It is **VERY IMPORTANT** that ears are checked again after the course of medication as there is **no other way** of being 100% sure that the infection is totally resolved.

If no improvement is seen or the infection gets worse, a swab will be sent to the lab for culture of the bacteria and antibiotic sensitivity testing so that we know exactly what the bacteria involved are and which antibiotic will be most successful in their treatment. Also, if the ear drum has been damaged, **some medications can be dangerous** to use as they are toxic to the inner ear.

Do not leave ear infections in your pet untreated hoping they will go away! The longer the infection is present, the harder it is to treat due to pain and inflammation leading to narrowing of the ear canal. Scarring of the ear canal also makes future recurrent infections more likely.



Chronic infection predisposes to lifelong ear problems and can also result in aural haematomas – a swelling of your pet's ear which results from headshaking, bursting blood vessels in the ear. This condition usually requires surgery to resolve – as well as treatment for the cause.

Prevention of Ear Infections

1. Weekly cleaning of the ears with an ear cleaner recommended by the veterinarian. This loosens wax deposits and any foreign material and helps keep the environment in the ear dry and unfriendly to bacteria. It also allows monitoring for increased discharge or pain.
2. If any signs of ear worry occur, seek veterinary attention immediately.

AURAL HAEMATOMAS

You may first notice there is something wrong because your pet starts shaking his/her head and scratching at their ears with their paws. Next thing you know one of their ears has ballooned out and it seems quite uncomfortable and painful.

This is an aural haematoma, or a big blood clot which has formed between the cartilage and the skin of your pet's ear. It occurs due to blood vessel rupture from your pet shaking and scratching the ear.

The irritation may be caused by hair, fleas or foreign material in the ear canal or because of an ear infection. An aural haematoma may also be formed during a fight or play with another dog, or other external trauma.

What can the vet do about this fat ear?

The vet will examine your pet's ears for a reason that this has happened. Because the ear is often tender, anaesthesia may be required for this. If a foreign body or a clump of hair is found then this will need to be removed, or if infection is present, then it will need to be treated effectively to prevent recurrence of the problem.

The haematoma (blood clot) can only be corrected surgically – an incision is made to remove the clot and a series of sutures are placed in the ear to prevent it filling up with blood again. These sutures will have to stay in place for two to three weeks to allow healing.

If the cause of the irritation was an ear infection, the vet may have to spend considerably more time in surgery cleaning your pet's ears out, and examining smears to identify which type of bacteria or yeast is thriving there. Your pet may also need to go home on ear medication and antibiotic tablets.

The sooner your pet receives veterinary attention for any cause of ear worry, the less likely it is that they will develop an aural haematoma and require surgery.

Please seek your vet's advice sooner rather than later!