

Ear Issues

Otitis Externa [inflammation of the outer ear] is one of the most common reasons for small animals to present to a veterinary clinic. Common symptoms may include a combination of head shaking, bad odor, redness, exudate (dirty wax on the outer ear) and pain on manipulation of the ear. Causes of Otitis Externa are defined as either Primary or Secondary, with factors that contribute to or promote ear disease. Identifying the cause will help determine if the ear disease is curable or if lifelong management is required.

Primary causes of Otitis Externa are those that create disease in a normal ear. Primary factors alter the ear environment, which allows secondary infections to develop.

- Allergies
- Autoimmune disease
- Endocrine disease
- Fungal/viral/parasites

Secondary causes of Otitis Externa are those which cause disease in an abnormal ear.

- Bacteria
- Yeast overgrowth
- Medication reactions
- Overcleaning

Otitis Externa is often secondary to an underlying disease process such as allergies, parasites, foreign bodies and accumulation of excessive hair in the canal. Excessive moisture cause of humid environments, swimming or overzealous/abrasive/improper ear cleaning may also lead to otitis externa.

The single most important tool for diagnosing Otitis is a microscopic examination of the ear discharge. This guides our treatment by identifying bacteria or fungal infection types and allows progress to be monitored.

In most cases a topical treatment following a complete cleansing of the external ear provides resolution. Treatment for Otitis Externa and Otitis Media usually involves outpatient care, usually after cleaning thoroughly in the clinic which may need an anaesthetic and take over an hour. In severely painful or chronic cases repeated ear cleaning under anaesthetic may be required and oral antibiotics or antifungals may be prescribed. Anti-inflammatory pain relief is also important to reduce the pain and help prevent further narrowing of the ear canal.

Follow-up treatments for Otitis Externa and Otitis Media involve repeated microscopic examinations of the ear discharge and control of any underlying diseases. For best results we will treat for a time after there is microscopic resolution of the infection. With the proper therapy, most cases of Otitis Externa will resolve within three to eight weeks, but some cases may require life-long management.

Otitis Externa causes pain, itching, and redness, and when the condition is chronic, it often results in a ruptured ear drum and Otitis Media. Signs such as tilting the head, not eating, incoordination, and even vomiting may indicate the infection and inflammation has spread to the inner ear.

In patients susceptible to Otitis Externa (those with underlying disease) regular ear cleaner with an appropriate cleaner may be suggested to prevent secondary infections. The cleaner selected by your veterinarian will create an environment (pH) in the ear which can help prevent overgrowth of bacteria and yeast.

Ear Disease can be incredibly frustrating to treat and can take a number of weeks to get under control. Follow-up examinations will incur additional charges for progress exam, diagnostics and repeat medications.