

ORAH Info:

My Dog Has An Ear Infection-- Now What?



Infections of the ear canal by bacteria and/or yeast is one of the most common types of infections seen in dogs. Some breeds seem more prone to ear infections, but they may occur in any breed.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF AN EAR INFECTION?

A dog with an ear infection is uncomfortable. The ears often become red and inflamed and may develop an odor. A dark brown or yellowish discharge commonly occurs. Dogs often shake their heads and paw at or rub their ears, in an effort to get the debris and fluid out.

DON'T THESE SYMPTOMS USUALLY MEAN EAR MITES?

Ear mites can indeed cause several of these symptoms, including a black discharge, scratching, and head shaking. However, far more commonly, these symptoms are caused by a yeast or bacterial infection. Ear mite infections generally occur in puppies, and more rarely in adult dogs. Sometimes ear mites will create conditions within the ear canal which leads to a secondary infection with bacteria and yeast, which requires different treatments than an infection with mites alone.

CAN I JUST COME BY AND GET SOME MEDICATION FOR MY DOG'S EARS?

There are several kinds of bacteria and a least one type of yeast which might cause an ear infection. Without knowing the kind of infection present, we may not know which drug is the most appropriate to use. In some cases, the ear infection may be caused by a foreign body or a tumor in the ear canal. In others, allergies may be the underlying cause of irritation and infection. Treatment with medication alone will not resolve these problems. A veterinary exam helps us determine how best to treat your dogs ears.

HOW ARE EAR INFECTIONS TREATED?

During the vets exam, the ear canal is examined with an otoscope, an instrument that provides magnification and light. This provides a good view of the ear canal, ear drum, and any debris in the canal. Some dogs have such a heavy buildup of debris, or are so painful, that we may have to treat the infection for a while before we can examine the ear canal completely. In some cases, sedation is required for a full exam and cleaning.

Examining material from the ear canal under the microscope helps the vet choose the right medication to treat the inflamed ear canal. Sometimes oral medications such as steroids are used to complement the effects of topical treatment (medications applied directly to the ear).

An important part of the examination process is identifying any underlying disease. Most dogs with chronic or recurrent ear infections have allergy problems or low thyroid function (hypothyroidism). If underlying disease is diagnosed, it must also be treated. Otherwise, the ear infection will either not respond well to medication, or it will regularly recur.

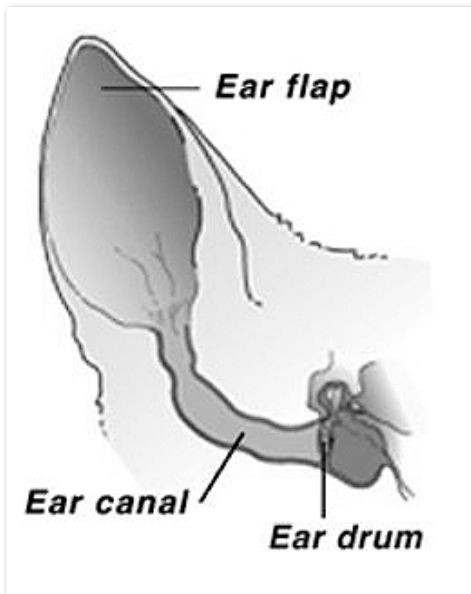
During the course of treatment, a repeat exam is often necessary to check progress and ensure the treatment is working.

HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO TREAT EAR INFECTIONS?

Dogs with ear infections are usually miserable. Their ears are a source of constant pain and irritation, which makes them shake their heads and scratch. This can cause broken blood vessels in the ear flap, which may cause severe swelling and bleeding, which in turn may require surgery to fix. Even dogs who don't seem extremely uncomfortable can have serious side effects from longstanding or recurrent ear infections. Chronic ear infections sometimes penetrate the ear drum itself, resulting in an inner-ear infection and permanent hearing loss. The cartilage and skin of the ear canal changes making it harder and harder to treat the infection. Even the bacteria in the ear can change over time, becoming resistant to antibiotics and therefore harder to kill.

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO GET MEDICATION IN MY DOG'S EAR?

It's important to get the medication deep into the ear canal, not just into the area near the ear flap. A dog's ear canal is "L" shaped. The vertical portion connects with the outside of the ear; the horizontal portion lies deeper and ends at the eardrum. Follow these steps to clean and medicate your dog's ears:



1) Gently pull the ear flap straight up and out from the head at about a 45 degree angle. Hold it with one hand.

2) Squirt a generous amount of cleanser deep into the ear canal, while continuing to hold up the ear flap. Hold this position long enough for the cleanser to run down to the turn between the vertical and horizontal canals. Fill the ear canal with cleanser so that it just overflows.

3) Put one finger in front of the base of the ear flap, and put your thumb behind it. Massage and squeeze the ear canal between your finger and thumb. A squishing sound will tell you that the cleanser has gone into the horizontal canal.

4) Release the ear and let your dog shake its head. Wait 2-5 minutes for the cleanser to loosen dried up debris.

5) Use cotton balls to clean the vertical ear canal of debris. Put the cotton ball so far into the canal that you almost lose your grip on it. You can use a twist of tissue to get deeply into the ear. For small dogs, cotton swabs, used gently, may be best. Apply more cleanser and repeat the process you get a lot of debris the first time.

6) Again holding the ear flap straight up, put the nozzle of the medication bottle deep into the ear canal, and apply 5 or 6 drops' worth of medication deep into the vertical part of the ear canal. Hold the ear up long enough for the medication to run down to the turn between the vertical and horizontal canals. If the nozzle on the medication bottle is properly placed in the ear canal, you may not be able to see how much medication you are putting into the ear. If you like you can squeeze a little bit out beforehand, so you now how hard to squeeze the bottle to get out the proper amount of medication.

7) Repeat steps 3 and 4 to massage the medication deep into the ear canal.