

Heathcote Veterinary Clinic

1335b Princes Hwy
Heathcote 2233
Telephone (02) 9520 0655
Fax: (02) 9520 7755



Hospital Hours
Monday to Friday 9.00am – 7.00pm
Saturday from 9.00am
Sunday 9.00am – 12.00pm

OTITIS EXTERNA (EAR INFECTIONS)

What causes ear infections?

Animals with droopy ears and/or a great deal of hair in the ear canal seem to have the most problems with ear inflammations and infections. These characteristics plus the warm and enclosed nature of the ear canal provide an excellent environment for infectious agents that cause inflammation.

Bacteria, fungi and ear mites are common causes of ear inflammation in dogs and cats. Allergies, seborrhea, hormonal imbalances, trauma, foreign objects (such as plant seeds), exposure to water, and tumours also cause ear inflammation.

What are the symptoms of an ear infection?

Dogs with ear infections are miserable. Their ears are a source of constant pain resulting in head shaking and scratching. The ears often become red and inflamed and develop an offensive odor. A black or yellowish discharge commonly occurs. Ear mites can cause similar symptoms but occur most commonly in puppies.

How are ear infections treated?

- Cleansing the ear canal is always recommended to clear accumulated debris. If the otitis is painful and/or an extensive process, cleansing should ideally be undertaken with the pet under sedation or anesthesia. Otoscopy is often recommended as an aid in this process.
- Topical medication tailored to treat the specific bacteria, yeast, or mites present is typically used.
- Systemic antimicrobials (antibiotic given by mouth or injection) are indicated in some cases, such as if the eardrum is ruptured.
- Systemic anti-inflammatory medications, such as corticosteroids, are sometimes employed to reduce the pain, redness, and swelling. Antihistamines may also be prescribed.

Head shaking and scratching can also cause broken blood vessels in the ear flap called an ear hematoma, which requires surgery. So it is important to start treatment as soon as you notice a problem.

What is the prognosis?

Nearly all ear infections that are properly diagnosed and treated can be cured. However, if an underlying cause remains unidentified and untreated, the outcome will be less favorable. Several examinations, along with sending cultures off to the lab and surgery may be needed before the process is complete and we can expect ultimate success.

My dog has chronic ear infections. Can I just give medications I already have? What does this mean in the long run?

Chronic ear infections can penetrate the eardrum and result in an internal ear infection and permanent hearing loss. Therefore, it is important that your dog be examined with each infection to ensure that the eardrum is intact. Administration of certain medications can result in loss of hearing if the eardrum is ruptured. This can only be detected by a thorough ear examination by your veterinarian.

Closing of the ear canal is another result of a chronic ear infection. This is known as *hyperplasia*. There are medications that can shrink the swollen tissues and open the canal in some dogs. Severe cases of hyperplasia will eventually require surgery.

How do I administer medication in the ear?

It is important to get the medication into the horizontal part of the ear canal. Unlike our ear canal, the dog's external ear canal is "L" shaped. The vertical canal connects with the outside of the ear and is the upper part of the "L". The horizontal canal lies deeper in the canal and terminates at the eardrum. Our goal is to administer the medication into the lower part of the "L" - the horizontal ear canal.

The ear canal may be medicated by following these steps:

1. Gently pull the earflap straight up and hold it with one hand.
2. Apply a small amount of medication into the vertical part of the ear canal while continuing to keep the earflap elevated. Hold this position long enough for the medication to run down to the turn between the vertical and horizontal canal.
3. Put one finger in front of and at the base of the earflap, and put your thumb behind and at the base.
4. Massage the ear canal between your finger and thumb. A squishing sound tells you that the medication has gone into the horizontal canal.
5. Release the ear and let your dog shake its head. Many medications will contain a wax solvent and you will observe debris leaving the ear as your dog shakes its head.
6. If a second medication is to be used, apply it in the same manner approximately 15 minutes after the first medication.
7. When all medications have been applied, clean the outer part of the ear canal and the inside of the earflap with a cotton ball soaked in some of the medication. Do not use cotton tipped applicators to do this, as they tend to push debris back into the vertical ear canal.

How do I clean my dogs ears after the infection is cleared?

Keeping your pet's ears clean is important because it helps prevent an environment in the ears that promotes inflammation. We can show you how to properly do this and what cleaning products are safe to use with your pet.

Never insert anything (Q-tips, cotton swabs) into the ear canal. Cotton balls may be used for wiping dissolved wax and cleaning fluid from the inner surface of the pinna (ear flap), but cotton swabs/Q-tips only push debris back into the deeper parts of the canal, which is counterproductive and could be dangerous (ruptured ear drum).

