



# Ear Problems



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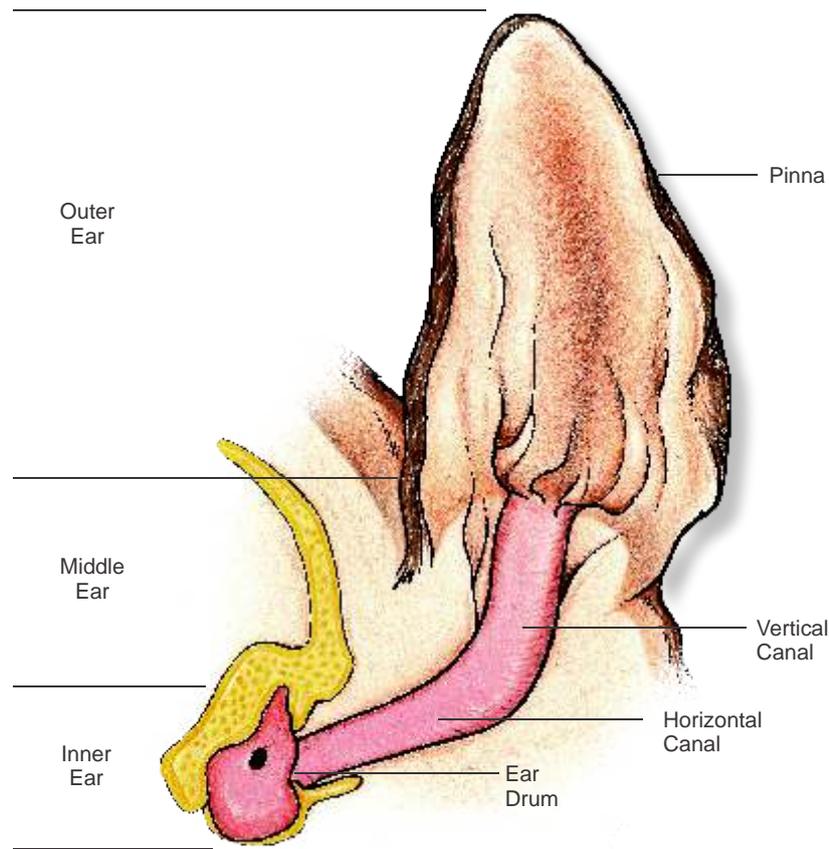
# ears

All ears are prone to infection but more commonly this affects dogs.

It's pretty easy to spot an ear infection. Just watch your pet scratch and rub at their ears.

Most ear infections are easily treatable but if left can result in serious damage.

It's always best to have ear problems seen to by us so we can properly diagnose the problem and effectively treat it.



## What happens during the consultation?

First we will examine your pet's ear canal using an instrument called an Otoscope. This will allow us to determine whether the eardrum is intact and if there is any foreign material in the canal which shouldn't be there. If your pet is in a lot of pain we might have to administer a sedation or anaesthetic to ensure your pet is as comfortable and pain free as possible.

We will then examine a sample of the material from the ear canal to determine which organism is causing the infection. This is called 'Cytology' and it will help us to choose the right medication for your pet. If your dog has a heavy buildup of debris in the ear, sedation may be needed to first clean the canal so we can examine it completely.

Sometimes results reveal the presence of more than one type of infection (ie a bacteria and a fungus, or two kinds of bacteria). If this is the case in your pet, multiple medications or a broad-spectrum medication will be required.

Many dogs with chronic or recurrent ear infections have allergy problems or low thyroid function (hypothyroidism). If an underlying disease is detected, it must also be treated.



## Common Ear Problems

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### Otitis Externa (external ear infection)

#### What is Otitis Externa?

Otitis Externa is an infection of the external (outside) ear canal. It is one of the most common infections seen in dogs with some breeds being more at risk than others at getting them eg Poodles and Cocker Spaniels, Schnauzers and Basset Hounds. In cats, it's the Persian who is more prone or at risk of suffering from these infections.

#### What are the symptoms?

Dry, crusty pinna (ear flap), inflammation, smell, moist discharge, head shaking, scratching at ear or rubbing side of face.

#### What are the causes?

Primary causes are parasites, food allergy, accumulation of hair and dead skin build up. Other factors that may contribute include bacterial infections and mixed infections from bacteria and fungal species.

#### What if it's not treated?

If Otitis Externa is not treated the infection can move down the ear canal causing inflammation of both the vertical and

horizontal ear canals. This is called Otitis Media or Inflammation of the middle ear.

### Otitis Interna (inner ear infection)

#### What is Otitis Interna?

Otitis Interna is an infection of the inner ear. It often occurs without Otitis Externa or Media but it is possible for Otitis Media to lead to Otitis Interna.

#### What are the symptoms?

Symptoms depend on how severe the infection is but can include - head tilt to one side, extreme pain, walking in circles (poor balance), reluctance to chew, pawing at ear.

### What is the treatment for these ear infections?

Most bacterial infections will resolve with early antibiotic therapy however if there are frequent relapses and surgical drainage may be necessary.



## Types of infection

- Bacteria  
Common skin pathogens. The most common being *Staphylococcus intermedius*
- Fungal – common skin pathogens  
The most common being *Malassezia*
- Parasitic  
Ear mites - *Otodectes*
- Other  
Foreign bodies - material such as dirt, insects, grass seeds.

## Treatment

### Clean out the organic debris

Any medication used needs to be able to reach the site of the infection. If the ear canal is blocked up with dirt, pus and wax material, the medications will not have a chance to reach the site of action needed.

We use a non irritative ear cleaning solution a couple of times a day for 3 days or so until there is little discharge. Medications can then be used into the ear canal and these will then have direct contact to the problem area.

As the animal's ear canal consists of the vertical then horizontal canal, flushing thoroughly of the ear canal with retro-pulsion will be needed in some cases to remove all of

the organic material. This is sometimes performed under a heavy sedation or general anaesthesia.

## Medications

The choice of medication used will be based on either the cytology after examination and staining under the microscope, or on the culture and sensitivity performed by the laboratory.

The ear canal will be swabbed and rolled out onto a microscope slide. This is then stained with a blue / red pigment stain that allows easier determination of the type of infection when examined under the microscope. This can be done in our own clinic and only takes a few minutes.

In cases of chronic otitis, a culture and sensitivity is performed at an external laboratory using the sample we obtained from the ear canal. This allows us to know exactly which type of microbe is infecting the ear canal and then to prescribe a medication specific to that bug that we know will destroy the infection. This test will take a few days to be performed.



## Surgery

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A poorly responding case may be referred on to surgery.

### **Zepp's Operation**

This is the most common type of ear canal operation and involves opening up the vertical ear canal so that material can escape directly from the horizontal canal. This is done by surgically removing the cartilage down to the horizontal canal.

### **Ear Ablation**

This operation involves total removal of the lining of the ear canal. Animals are rendered deaf after this process as the opening of the ear is closed. The vertical and horizontal canals are removed so no further infection is possible. The pinna or ear flap is left.

### **Bulla Osteotomy**

In some cases this procedure is needed to drain remaining infection from the middle and inner ear. This procedure is often performed at the same time as the total ear ablation.



“Clean and dry your pets ears after a bath or a swim”

## Prevention

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The anatomy of the animal's ear plays a large component as to whether they are susceptible to otitis. In some animals the pinna lies over the canal – floppy ear dogs – and so the heat and humidity in the canal predisposes it to infection. Other animals have hair filled ear canals allowing material to be trapped easier in here and then increase humidity. Some animals are genetically predisposed with thickened ear canals and reduced canal space, such as the Shar Pei with all of their extra rolls of skin.

Prevention involves avoiding excessive moisture in the ear canal – such as regular ear cleaning and drying especially after swimming and bathing. Excess hair removal from the ear canal. Thorough skin cleaning will avoid excessive bacteria and fungus on the skin. Allergy control can be done through avoidance of allergens or by using medications such as anti-inflammatories as needed.