

OTITIS



If you have any further queries regarding the welfare of your pet, please do not hesitate to ask a member of staff

We are happy to assist!

How common are ear infections in dogs?

Infection of the external ear canal (outer ear) by bacteria or yeast, is one of the most common types of infections seen in dogs. It is called otitis externa. Some breeds, particularly those with large or hairy ears like Cocker Spaniels, Miniature Poodles or Old English Sheepdogs, seem more prone to ear infections, but they can occur in any breed.

Why does a dog get ear disease?

A dog's ear is quite different to ours. Humans simply have a horizontal tube that runs straight from the side of the head into the inner ear (auditory canal). In the dog however, the outside opening of the ear canal is high up on the side of the head; the canal runs vertically down the side of the head then makes a sharp right angle into the inner ear. Additionally some dogs have an ear flap which partially covers the canal opening, making the canal hot and sweaty. A variety of things can irritate your dog's ears, including foreign bodies (such as grass seeds) lodged in the ear canal, and mites. It is often difficult to find the original cause of the ear disease, because your dog's ear is itchy, it scratches it and sets up the infection.

What are the symptoms of an ear infection?

A dog with an ear infection is uncomfortable and the ear canals are sensitive. The dog shakes its head and scratches its ears trying to get the debris and fluid out. The ears often become red and inflamed and develop an offensive odour. A black or yellowish discharge commonly occurs. Sometimes, dogs with sore ears will just sit with their head tilted to one side.

Why can't my vet just prescribe some treatment over the phone?

There are several kinds of organisms which can cause ear infections. Without knowing the kind of infection present, we do not know which medication to use. In some cases, the ear infection may be caused by a foreign body or tumour in the ear canal. Treatment with medication alone will not resolve these problems. The dog must be examined to be sure that the eardrum is intact; if it is not administration of certain medications can result in loss of hearing. So it is necessary for your dog to be examined by your vet.

How are ear infections treated?

The results of the otoscopic examination and bacteriology usually determine the course of treatment. If there is a foreign body or tick lodged in the ear canal, the dog is sedated so that it can be removed. As stated previously, some dogs have such a heavy buildup of debris that sedation is needed to cleanse the canal and examine it completely. Cytologic study of debris from the ear canal dictates which drug to use. Sometimes, it reveals the presence of more than one type of infection; this situation usually requires the use of multiple medications or a broad-spectrum medication.

An important part of the evaluation of the patient is the identification of underlying disease. Many dogs with chronic or recurrent ear infections have allergies or low thyroid function (hypothyroidism). If underlying disease is suspected, it must be diagnosed and treated, if possible. If this cannot be done, the dog is less likely to have a favourable response to treatment. Also, the dog might respond temporarily, but the infection will recur (usually when ear medication is discontinued).

It is important to re-check the ear at the end of the treatment to ensure the infection has fully cleared up.

How important is it to treat?

Dogs with ear infections are miserable. Their ears are a source of constant pain resulting in head shaking and scratching. However, that is not the only problem. Head shaking and scratching can also cause broken blood vessels in the ear flap, requiring surgery, and chronic ear infections can penetrate the ear drum and result in an internal ear infection. It is unlikely the ear disease will clear up on its own. The longer you leave it before you start treatment the harder it becomes to clear up the irritation.

My dog's ear canal is nearly closed. Is that a problem?

Closing of the ear canal is another result of a chronic ear infection. There are medications that can shrink the swollen tissues and open the canal in some dogs. However, some cases will eventually require surgery.

What is the goal of surgery?

The surgery for a closed ear canal is called a lateral ear resection. The goal of the surgery is to remove the vertical part of the ear canal and to remove swollen tissue from the horizontal canal. Removing the vertical canal should be successful, but removal of large amounts of tissue from the horizontal canal is more difficult. In some cases, the ear canal is surgically removed which may result in some permanent impairment of hearing.

If you have any queries or would like to know more, please do not hesitate to call.