

Otitis



Otitis means inflammation of the ear. Signs of ear infection include scratching at the ears and/or shaking the head. Ears are often very red. A foul, smelly discharge is often present if the infection involves the outer ear.

Causes of ear infections include ear parasites (mites), injuries, bacterial or yeast infections, matted hair in the ear canals, food allergy, or foreign objects in an ear canal. Over-the-counter ear cleaners and the use of peroxide or alcohol to clean the ears by well-meaning owners can cause the infection because the ears cannot properly drain and dry after cleaning. Also, many products can be toxic to the ear, especially if the ear drum is not intact.

Long, floppy ears are more prone to infections because the area inside the ear canal becomes warm, dark, and moist, providing a perfect environment for infections to live. The major problem is that the normal anatomy of the ear does not allow for drainage of ear discharges.

If ear infections are not properly treated, the infection often becomes "chronic" which means it tends to reoccur. Recurrent infections cause the ear canal tissue to change in appearance becoming thick and rough. This often severely impairs hearing, causing your pet to become deaf.

The type of ear infection must be determined by examination of the ear discharge under the microscope, as well as visually inspecting the ear canal and eardrum with an otoscope. Due to the severe inflammation often present, sedation is sometimes required to properly examine and treat the ears.

Treatment varies with the type of infection and length of time the infection has been present. Systemic antibiotics are often required as well as topical medication. Chronic infections may require life-long treatment to keep the infection under control. This is why it is so important that you follow directions and treat the ear for a sufficient length of time.

Therapy can include cleaning the ears (NOT WITH Q-TIPS), ear drops, antibiotics, anti-inflammatory medications, and/or BNT (an antibiotic/antifungal/steroid combination that is left in the affected ear for two weeks).

Not all of these will apply to every pet, and the proper course of treatment should be determined by your pet's veterinarian.