



ABOUT THE DISEASE

Otitis media and *otitis interna* are inflammation of structures within the ear.

Otitis media affects the middle ear and often results from an extension of otitis externa, especially when a ruptured ear drum is present.

Otitis interna is the inflammation of structures within the inner ear. It is much less common, but often results from an extension of *otitis media* and occasionally spreads through a blood infection.

These infections can affect one or both ears in canine and feline patients.

Signs are similar to otitis externa but often include tilting or rotating the head toward the affected side. In more advanced cases, patients may exhibit signs of facial nerve paralysis (elevation of the third eyelid, ear droop, lip droop, change in pupil diameter).

With severe, chronic (ongoing), or nonresponsive cases, neurologic deficits and hearing loss may be permanent, even if the infection is resolved.

Please see the [Otitis Externa](#) document for additional information.

OBTAINING A DIAGNOSIS

A physical exam showing ear base pain with neurologic symptoms are highly suggestive of a patient with either *otitis media* or *otitis interna*.

Diagnosis can be challenging when the patient has pain that is preventing evaluation of the ear drum.

Advanced imaging techniques (CT or MRI) are more sensitive than routine radiographs (x-rays).

TREATMENT

Treatment is most successful when started early with minimal clinical symptoms. Chronic cases are often difficult to treat and have random recurrence.

Patients typically require oral medications to help control inflammation and infection, and usually require concurrent management to treat both.

If the tympanic membrane (ear drum) is intact and the disease does not respond well to medications, the ear drum may need to be perforated (myringotomy) to relieve pressure, enable bacterial culture/sensitivity, and allow drainage of fluid.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Early intervention will maximize success and minimize long-term changes and damage.
- Ear infections often have an underlying cause, and simple treatment should not be elected in patients who have repeat symptoms.