



## OTITIS EXTERNA

### ABOUT THE DISEASE

**Otitis externa (ear infection)** is inflammation of the outer ear canal, which occurs most often in canine patients. Most caregivers notice the skin lining the outer ear becomes red, itchy, painful, and may discharge pus, waxy material, or other debris. Other symptoms involve head shaking, scratching, rubbing, a foul odor, irritability, and hearing loss in long-term situations.

This condition is often very uncomfortable and should be treated as soon as possible to provide relief and prevent long-term changes within the ear canal.

Diagnosing and treating **ear infections** often provides immediate relief, but in patients where there are repeat infections, an underlying disease should be identified. Some of these conditions include:

- Ear mites (more common in feline patients)
- Food or environmental allergies
- Weakened immune system or autoimmune diseases
- Hypothyroid disease (canine patients)
- Foreign objects or other plant materials (Grass awns/foxtails)
- Ear canal tumors
- Ear canal polyps

### OBTAINING A DIAGNOSIS

**Otitis externa** is usually diagnosed after an examination and full clinical history are obtained by a veterinarian, as well as risk factors for underlying/predisposing diseases. Be sure to bring any ear cleaners or medications to the appointment to help identify other risk factors.

An ear swab with microscopic evaluation (cytology) is often the diagnostic of choice to identify parasites, bacteria, yeast, and abnormal cells.

In more severe cases, a swab may be taken to grow the bacteria to determine a proper course of antibiotics. This testing series is referred to as a culture & sensitivity.

### TREATMENT

The treatment for **otitis externa** requires the following:

- Controlling the inflammation – achieved with either glucocorticoids or non-steroidal antiinflammatories
- Proper treatment of infectious disease – achieved following interpretation of an ear cytology
  - Topical ear treatments are most common
  - Oral medications sometimes used in severe cases
- Determination of the potential underlying cause

In extreme or advanced cases, surgery performed by surgical specialists may be required to remove parts or all of the external ear canal to minimize ongoing potential for **ear infections**.

### TIPS FOR SUCCESS

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