

Dog Ear Infection - Otitis Externa

Most ear infections are considered an outer ear infection (Otitis Externa). This condition is very common in dogs due to their long and deep ear canals that encourage the growth of bacteria and yeast. This can be an ongoing problem, and may require ongoing medications and therapy to resolve and control. Due to a large range of causes (sometimes even multiple), ear infections range in severity and can require many different types of therapy and treatment to resolve.

The Main Causes of Ear Infections:

1. Allergies- This is the most common cause of recurring ear infections. The allergy may be related to a food/treat or may be related to something in the environment. The environmental allergies may be carpet, bedding, laundry detergent, plants in your yard, smoking, dirt, sun, ants, bees, another animal, dust mites, etc. Many factors can cause allergic reactions, therefore it may take a long time to determine the cause of the allergy. Remember that ear infections can return if the underlying cause of allergies is unresolved.
2. Water in the ear- If your dog swims, plays with the hose, plays in flood irrigations, swims at the beach, or is frequently bathed, trapped water that gets in the ear may contribute to the ear infection.
3. Foreign material in the ear- If your dog gets a foxtail or a piece of grass in the ear, this may cause an ear infection. Sedation may be required to evaluate the ear since there is usually a large amount of pus and debris which prevents full evaluation of the ear.
4. Hair in the ear- If your dog has a large amount of hair in the ear canal, we recommend plucking the hair to prevent infections. These infections are caused by the hair trapping water and bacteria deep inside.
5. Trauma to the ear- If another dog is biting the ear or if your dog is excessively shaking his head, this may cause an ear infection.
6. Ear mites- Mites are a common cause of ear infections in homes with outdoor cats, dogs that go to dog parks, and in puppies or kittens.

Ear Infection Treatments:

1. Topical Medications are recommend to attack the infection. If your pet will not allow you to place medication in the ears, call for instructions. We may need to clean the ears with sedation first, or may be able to try oral medication.

****We have a new medication option that allows us to medicate the ear once which will last for 2 weeks so that you do not have to medicate the ear at home.**

2. Ear Cleaners are used to help clean wax and debris out of the ear, and to prevent infections after swimming and grooming. We recommend Epi-otic to clean the ears.

3. Antibiotics (oral or injectable) may be recommended for ear infections that have bacterial infections.

4. Antifungal medication may be recommended for yeast and fungal infections in the ear.

5. Cortisone [steroid] (oral or injectable) may be necessary to help reduce inflammation and to help with underlying allergies. Aspirin-type products should never be given with steroid products. Typically cortisone is given no more than once a month in moderate to severe ear infections.

6. Deep ear flush/cleaning with anesthesia or sedation is often required to aid in resolution of the ear infection. This can be started initially to speed up healing of the ear infection or considered if ear infection is not clearing up with traditional treatment.

7. Pain medication may assist, when cleaning and medicating the ears, by making the pet more comfortable.

8. Antihistamines may be recommended if allergies are suspected to be the cause of the ear infection.

9. Allergy therapy and food trial may be recommended to treat infection if the cause of the ear infection is related to allergies.

10. Surgical therapy is recommend for chronic ear infections to reduce the severity of the ear infections.

11. Ear mite medications may be recommended if mites are noted.

***Remember that ear infections can be an ongoing problem and may require ongoing treatment and testing. If the outer ear infection causes an inner ear infection, the treatment may vary widely and it make take many months, or longer, to resolve. Pets with a history of ear infections require preventative care to reduce the risk of future ear infections, such as regular ear cleanings and bi-annual examinations. Ear infections can also lead to additional ailments; such as hotspots on the face, a head tilt, and/or ear hematomas.**