

EAR ISSUES

Inner Ear & Middle Ear Infections

Ear infections can be caused by a number of issues including fungal or bacterial infections, excess water in the ears, allergies and foreign material in the ear. An exam and/or swab sample can rule out or rule in causes. Symptoms of infection include excessive scratching at the ears, shaking ears, odor, discharge, redness and swelling. Severe infections will produce symptoms such as holding the head at an angle with the bad ear downward, circling, loss of balance, dizziness and in some cases vomiting. Severe cases will take longer to resolve and require strict adherence to vet advice. If problems persist and the vet has not cultured a sample from your dog's ears, insist on it as some infections are resistant to some medications and may require something very specific. Generally you will receive an ear wash or rinse, antibiotic or antifungal creams and/or pills. Keeping ear flow around the ears is very helpful. You may need to pin the ears to allow proper ear flow after medicating the ears. Use a cut off sock or pantyhose to wrap the ears behind the neck. Trim or remove any excess hair as well.

Some breeds—those with long, floppy ears—will be more prone to ear issues. Preventative maintenance can keep these to a minimum. Mix 1 part white vinegar and 2 pints water. Wipe out ear canal with a cotton ball. You can also use a bulb syringe but take care to flush gently with squeeze, release movements. You do not want a solid, steady heavy stream into the ears. Massage ears for 30 sec-1 minute to allow even distribution. Allow the dog to shake out excess water. Pin ears back and allow them to dry. There are many, over-the-counter topical solutions available as well.

If your dog has an ear infection, they may exhibit an unwillingness to eat their regular kibble, offer a slurry instead. It is easier for them to swallow, and a slurry causes less irritation. It can be made by adding warm water or broth to his/her regular kibble or canned food. Mash the mix until it is soupy.

Some dogs with food allergies will present with ear problems: redness, irritation, itchiness. Try switching out the main protein to something like lamb, salmon or bison or switching to a grain-free diet. It may take several weeks to see a change.

Ears, especially the margins, are a target for biting flies. The ears will become crusty, red, cracked and irritated. Use a fly repellent safe for pets to protect against flies.

Ear mites are another issue for many dogs. Dogs will flip and scratch at ears viciously when mites are present. Mites can be transferred from dog to dog and cat to dog. Treat all animals in the house. Ear mite presence can be detected by seeing blackish or reddish debris in the ears; the debris has the appearance of coffee grounds. Mites can be treated topically.

Ear hematomas or pockets of fluid in the ear flap may be the result of a dog flipping and shaking the ears violently. Hematomas will appear puffy. The vet must sedate the dog and drain this area or there is a potential for long-term deformation of the ear.