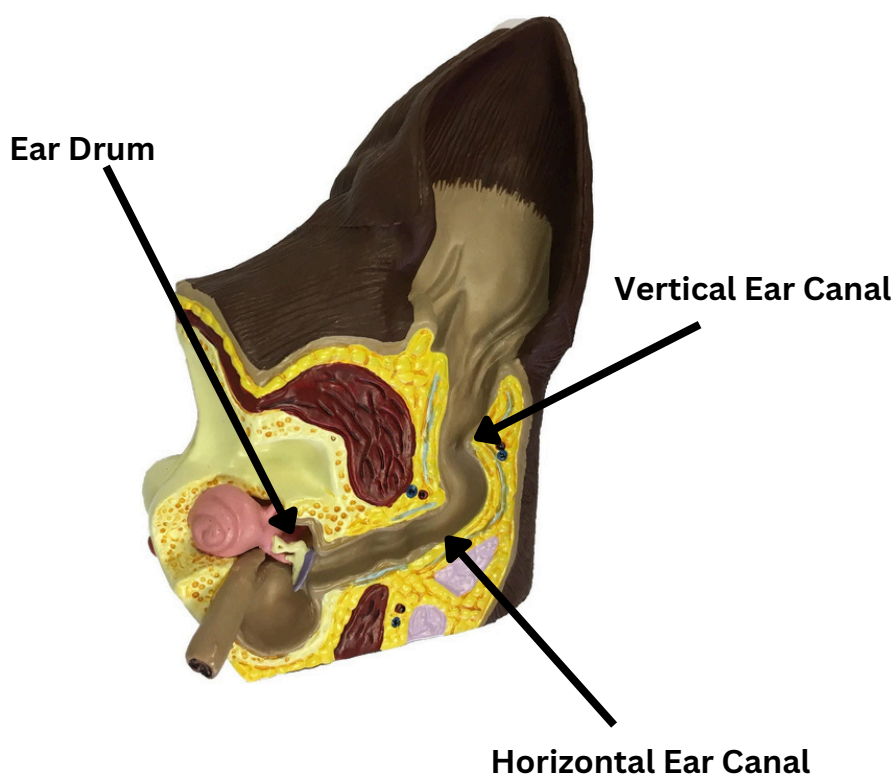


Otitis

Otitis is a condition that occurs when the layer of cells that line the external ear canal become inflamed. This can be classified as:

- Otitis externa: this is the most common ear problem that we see. It involves inflammation of the external ear canal, which includes the ear flap (pinna), both the vertical and horizontal canals and also the ear drum.
- Otitis media: inflammation of the middle ear
- Otitis interna: inflammation of the inner ear



Otitis externa

Dogs with otitis externa normally show a number of clinical signs, which may suggest to you that they have a problem:

- Shaking their head or scratching at their ears
- Painful or red ears
- Scaly skin
- Discharge from the ear: this can vary from creamy in colour to dark brown, and can vary in quantity and smell
- One or both ears can be affected
- Signs can be sudden or long term

If you notice any of these signs, it is important to seek veterinary attention, as they may be in discomfort and cause self trauma.

Causes

There are a number of potential causes which can lead or contribute to ear disease. These include but aren't limited to:

- Allergy - irritation from pollen and dust can result in ear disease. Sometimes the skin becomes itchy too
- Infection - such as certain bacteria, yeasts or a middle ear infection
- Foreign bodies - such as grass seeds
- Parasites - ear mites
- Traumatic in origin
- Symptom secondary to another disease
- Individual anatomy - narrow ear canal, hairy long ears or polyps
- Swimming

Diagnosis

As mentioned there are a number of different causes of ear disease and it is therefore important to get as much information as possible in order to make a diagnosis.

The Vet may use an otoscope to look down into the ear canal. This allows assessment of inflammation, enables us to see foreign bodies (e.g. grass seeds) or tumours and to examine the ear drum to see if ruptured.

Sometimes, the vet will want to take a smear from your dogs' ears, to assess the organisms present under a microscope. This can help to direct the treatment and may be required in ongoing or difficult to treat cases. In those persistent or non-responsive cases the vet may wish to send one of these swabs to an external laboratory for further information.

Early diagnosis and treatment is important to prevent a chronic painful disease for your dog. Sedation may be required to allow a thorough examination using an otoscope, especially if the ear is painful or your pet is uncooperative.

Treatment

Treatment will vary depending on the problem; however there are a number of treatment options:

- A course of ear drops - these contain antibiotics, antifungals and glucocorticoids. They treat the infection present and also help reduce the inflammation.
- Ear cleaner - this is used to reduce the discharge present in the ear, to enable the ear drops to do their job. Use the cleaner half an hour before applying drops. The frequency of cleaning usually decreases over time from daily to once or twice weekly as a preventative maintenance procedure.
- Corticosteroids - via injection and/or tablet form. These are used to reduce inflammation within the ear canal and therefore make your dog more comfortable. They also decrease discharge, pain and glandular secretions.
- Oral medication - sometimes oral medication is required to help treat the infection especially in long term cases and infection/inflammation of the middle ear is suspected.
- Sedation to pluck or flush ear canal

It is likely the vet will want to see you for a follow up appointment, this enables them to re-examine the ears to ensure the treatment has resolved the problem and potentially to discuss any underlying issues. Most cases take 2-4 weeks. Long term cases may take months to resolve and in some instances, treatment must be continued indefinitely.

If at any point you would like more advice or help on how to clean your dogs' ears or how to use medication properly, please don't hesitate to ask. One of our vets or nurses will be more than happy to help you do this.

Be sure to check your dogs ears regularly. Any changes it is time for a prompt check up with your vet.

Irritating medications e.g. home remedies and vinegar dilutions should be avoided. They cause swelling of the lining of the ear canal and an increase in glandular secretions, which predispose to bacterial or yeast infections.

It is very important, in all cases of ear disease, that all courses of treatment are completed. This helps reduce the risk of recurring disease and antibiotic resistance. If you have any medication left after you have finished the prescribed course, please don't reuse this at a later date without consulting your vet.

Sometimes ear problems become a cycle. The skin on the ear becomes irritated, especially if allergies are present. This breaks down the ears natural defences and creates a hot and humid environment for bacteria and yeast to grow. This causes more inflammation and so the cycle goes on! It is important to break this cycle and if your dog becomes prone to ear problems we need to try reduce the quantity of flare-ups with ongoing management.