

Ear Infections in Dogs and Cats

Infection and inflammation of the outer ear canal is a condition called otitis externa and is one of the most common reasons we see pets, particularly dogs, present to the vet.

Treating ear infections is crucial to alleviate pain, prevent potential hearing loss, and avoid the progression of infections that may lead to more severe complications and chronic issues.

Signs your pet may be suffering from otitis externa include:

- Shaking their head or pawing at their ears.
- Red, swollen, painful ears or ear canals.
- Thickening of the ear flap (pinna).
- Discharge coming from the ears (black, brown, yellow); often very smelly.



WHAT CAUSES EAR INFECTIONS?

Any of the following can be involved in ear infections. It is worth noting that the infection often involves bacteria and/or yeast that are natural inhabitants of the skin and ear canals, and proliferate under certain conditions.

Causes include:

- Allergies; including environmental (common) and food (much less common).
- Foreign material within the canal (such as a grass seed).
- Polyps or tumours.
- Mites.
- Excessive water or cerumen production.

Some patients suffer with constant or recurrent ear inflammation and ear infections, and these patients will need a thorough investigation process performed and then have a maintenance plan put into action. This may include food trials or referral to a specialist veterinary dermatologist and will likely be combined with ongoing allergy therapy for the ears.

HOW ARE THEY DIAGNOSED AND WHAT TESTING IS NEEDED?

Your vet will examine your pet's ears from the outside, inside (using an otoscope) and also take a sample with a swab to look at under the microscope. There are a number of different infections we see, including yeast, mites and several different types of bacteria, so looking at your pet's ear swabs under the microscope will help us to choose the most appropriate treatment straight away.

It is important to check down the ear canals with a scope to look for foreign bodies and assess the pet's ear drum (particularly if the infection is only one-sided), but sometimes this will be done later in the treatment course if your pet's ears are too hot and swollen for it to be done without causing significant pain.

Ear infections are very painful, it may be necessary for your pet to be hospitalised and undergo a general anaesthetic so the ears can be assessed and cleaned properly.

HOW ARE THEY TREATED?

Ear infections can be very frustrating and require prolonged treatment (over weeks or months). It is of critical importance that they be treated until the problem is resolved, and to do this you will need to follow veterinary advice regarding rechecking of the ears and cytology (microscopy).



COOMERA

☎ 07 5502 3333
📍 5/2 Sierra Place
Upper Coomera QLD 4209

CURRUMBIN

☎ 07 5598 4000
📍 7/34 Currumbin Creek Rd
Currumbin QLD 4223

ORMEAU

☎ 07 5549 2120
📍 178 Pascoe Road
Ormeau QLD 4208

We typically treat ear infections on one of two ways:

1. Ear medication to administer at home (the most common option). Follow the label in terms of amount, frequency and advice on revisits.
2. In some patients who do not tolerate ear handling, a long acting gel can be administered once weekly.

For some severe or very painful infections, an oral anti inflammatory may also be prescribed.

HOW IMPORTANT IS TREATMENT?

Ear infections are painful and uncomfortable for the patient and, therefore, require prompt and consistent treatment. If left untreated, or if prolonged shaking of the head continues to occur, damage to the ear flap (pinna) and even large blood pockets can occur. The latter are known as aural haematomas, and sometimes require surgical correction.

Prolonged or severe infections may lead to damage of the ear drum and deeper middle ear infections (otitis media). Otitis media is different from otitis externa and can lead to balance issues, bone infections and permanent hearing loss.

ONGOING MEASURES

Once the initial infection is under control and resolution has been confirmed through a negative ear swab, your vet may suggest a maintenance program to help prevent further issues if your pet has had multiple or severe ear infections. This will typically have two parts:

1. Regular weekly cleaning with a suggested ear cleaner. If a specific ear cleaner is not suggested, our main recommendation is Epi-Otic. You will be shown how to clear ears out properly using this product.
2. Instillation of an anti-inflammatory liquid weekly into the ear canal, ongoing.

Your vet may also speak to you about an ongoing oral anti-allergy medication if the above measures are not working as well as expected or your pet does not tolerate ear handling at all.

If you have any questions about your pet's ears or treatment, please contact the clinic for advice.

CYTOLOGY RESULTS

EAR	BACTERIA	YEAST
Left Ear	<input type="checkbox"/> Cocci <input type="checkbox"/> Rods <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input type="checkbox"/> Malassezia
Right Ear	<input type="checkbox"/> Cocci <input type="checkbox"/> Rods <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input type="checkbox"/> Malassezia

TODAY'S TREATMENT PLAN

METHOD	NAME	VOLUME/FREQUENCY	OTHER NOTES
Topical ear medication			
Ear cleaner			
Oral anti-inflammatories			
Preventative topical steroid			

PROGRESS EXAMINATION REQUIRED: Date: _____ Time: _____

Please note: Cytology (microscopy) will be performed at the review.



COOMERA

☎ 07 5502 3333
📍 5/2 Sierra Place
Upper Coomera QLD 4209

CURRUMBIN

☎ 07 5598 4000
📍 7/34 Currumbin Creek Rd
Currumbin QLD 4223

ORMEAU

☎ 07 5549 2120
📍 178 Pascoe Road
Ormeau QLD 4208