

# What to do for my pet's *itchy, sore ears?*

Use this handout to learn more about what otitis is and what you can do to help your pet's precious ears.

## How does it develop?

Many things cause pets' ears to become inflamed, including ear mites, a bacterial or yeast infection, a foreign object or mass within the ear, allergies, or medical conditions that allow infection to develop within the ear. Some breeds are more likely to develop problems because of their ear structure. **It can take time and a variety of diagnostic tests for your veterinarian to determine the underlying cause.** But this cause must be identified, or the problem can worsen and spread farther into the ear, causing your pet intense pain, and potential complications such as nerve damage and hearing loss. Pets that are left to scratch and shake too long can damage the outer part of the ears, or pinnae, so severely that they require surgical repair.

## How do I help?

Follow your veterinarian's instructions for cleaning your pet's ears and administering medications. **Be sure to bring your pet in for each recheck appointment your veterinarian schedules, even if the ear appears better.** Otitis often recurs in pets, and the medication that cleared it up the first time may not work the next time because a different type of infection may have developed. So be sure to see your veterinarian if signs do recur. Recurring ear infections can be a sign of underlying disease.

**If you have any questions, please call  
Cascade Veterinary Clinic at (250) 295-0312**

There are  
three  
stages  
of otitis



1

In the beginning, the external ear canal is affected, and you may notice that your pet is shaking its head or pawing at its ear. Your pet might also have an ear discharge, with or without an odour.

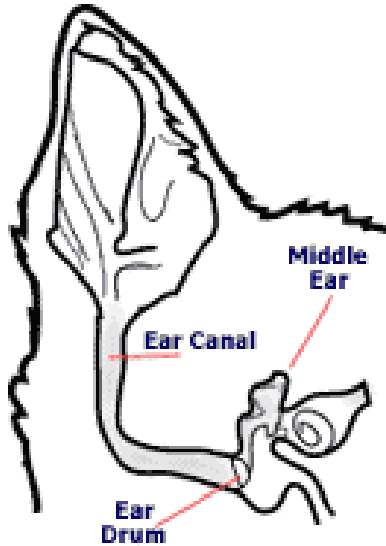
2

In the next stage, the disease spreads to the middle ear, which includes the ear drum.

3

In the final stage, otitis spreads to the inner ear, which contains your pet's balance system. At this point, some pets feel pain when opening their mouths and are reluctant to chew. Others may tilt their head to one side or develop balance problems. In severe cases, nerve damage will cause drooping lips or eyelids. Fortunately, pets who receive veterinary care before the infection reaches the inner ear have a good chance of full recovery and rarely develop these severe complications.

There are two steps that may be necessary for proper treatment of otitis. Most pets require cleaning to remove debris in the ear canal prior to applying any medication. Medication can't work properly if the debris in the ear prevents the medication from contacting the ear itself.



#### **Cleaning the ear:**

Apply the cleaning solution by inserting the tip of the bottle into the ear canal. You don't need to put the whole tip into the canal, as long as the first part is inserted the solution will be able to reach the full extent of the canal. Squirt enough solution into the ear to nearly fill the ear canal. Remove the bottle, and gently massage the ear canal from the outside to loosen any debris. Gently dry the ear canal with a cotton cosmetic pad or thin, soft, clean rag (such as part of an old t-shirt). **Only use cleaning solution advised by your veterinarian, as most solutions are harmful to an ear with a ruptured ear drum.**

#### **Applying medication:**

As with the solution, the tip of the medication bottle must be inserted into the ear canal in order for the medication to reach the site of the infection. If you can count the drops coming out, the medication isn't getting where it needs to. The applicator tips of ear medications are short enough that they will not reach the ear drum unless you push them in quite hard, even in cat and small dog ears. With the bottle tip in the ear canal, give the medication a little squeeze, then remove the bottle and massage the ear canal from the outside. If you can hear the medication squishing around in the ear, you have applied a sufficient amount. If you can't hear anything, apply a bit more medication. As a rule of thumb, one bottle of ear medication should treat both ears on a small dog or cat for 7 days, while a medium to large sized dog should go through two bottles of medication.

#### **Surgical aftercare following Aural Hematoma repair:**

If your pet has ruptured the blood vessels in the ear pinna(e) from severe head shaking, the resulting "blood blister" requires surgery – DON'T LANCE IT YOURSELF, as this could result in loss of the ear pinna! Following surgery, the ear pinna(e) must remain bandaged flat to the top of your pet's head – allowing it to shake freely will cause the hematoma to recur and will prevent healing. Your pet will need to wear a cone to prevent them from scratching the ear out of the bandage. Bandages will need to be changed daily, or as recommended by a veterinarian or registered veterinary technician (RVT). An RVT will demonstrate proper bandage care and changing when your pet is discharged. Please make sure you understand how manage the bandages before you leave the clinic – ask questions! Your pet will require oral antibiotics and pain medications following surgery, in addition to any ear medication prescribed by the veterinarian.

Your pet will likely still be feeling some of the effects of anesthesia for a few hours after surgery. They may not feel like eating the first night you bring them home – offer food as usual but do not be concerned if your pet doesn't want to eat until the next day. Offer a quiet and comforting environment at home.

During surgery, a drain is sutured into the ear. The drain must remain in place until the veterinarian determines it can be removed. Your pet will require at least two re-checks following surgery: one to remove the drain, and a second to make sure that the ear has healed well enough that the bandages and cone can be removed. These rechecks should be scheduled before you leave the clinic following your pet's surgery.