

Ouch! My Ear Hurts!

Guelph, ON



Have you ever had an ear infection? You know, the kind where your ear is ringing and it is so painful you can hardly concentrate? Well, our canine companions get this condition too and it is one of the most common reasons for a dog to visit the veterinarian! It is called otitis externa, or inflammation of the external ear canal. Dogs usually have an underlying medical condition that results in the external ear canal becoming inflamed. For example, the dog may have an environmental allergy, a food allergy, or a skin parasite.

Some of the first signs of this problem are the dog shaking their head or pawing and scratching at their ear. When the pet visits their veterinary healthcare team, the veterinarian will look in the ear and take a sample of the ear discharge for examination under the microscope. Because the skin is inflamed, the normal bacterial population of the skin may be disrupted, resulting in an overgrowth of bacteria or yeast. The microscopic exam tells us if the

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inflammation has progressed to an infection.

After an ear cleaning, it is time for medication. Most products for the treatment of otitis externa contain three ingredients: a steroid, an antibiotic, and an antifungal agent. The steroid decreases pain and inflammation and makes the pet more comfortable. The antibiotic and antifungal agents combat the infection, if present. Good antimicrobial stewardship is important, and an appropriate antimicrobial should be chosen for the suspected offending pathogen. It can take several days or weeks for the medication to completely address the inflammation and secondary infection. There are products available that can be administered at the veterinary clinic that last for 30 days, or if the pet owner prefers, they can take medication home to treat their pet once or twice daily.

As mentioned earlier, dogs usually have an underlying cause that results in otitis externa. Often, these dogs have an allergy. If this is not explored and addressed, the pet may experience repeated ear infections which can be frustrating for the pet owner and painful for the pet. Even though the dog may be more comfortable after a treatment, steps must be taken to try and identify the underlying cause to successfully manage their long-term health.