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Otitis Externa

(Ear Infection)

General Information

Otitis externa is an inflammation of the external ear canal that begins at the outside opening of the ear and extends inward to the eardrum. Causes include bacteria, fungi, ear mites, accumulation of wax, thick or matted hair in the ear canal, debris, impaired drainage of the ear, and infections from elsewhere in the body, etc.

The physical structure of the ears of dogs and cats (especially those with pendulous ears) favors the growth of bacteria and yeast because of the moist, dark, warm, environment created which may contain wax and other debris, conducive to growth of organisms. The funnel shape of the ear canal effectively traps debris, further complicating treatment of infections etc.

Important Points in Treatment:

1. General anesthesia is often necessary to allow thorough cleansing of the ear canal and to obtain specimens for bacterial cultures. Curretting (scraping) from the ear canal is the best means of facilitating removal of debris, wax, hair, etc. and thereby enabling the medication to contact the skin of the ear canal. Also, it is impossible to touch and cleanse the distal ear canal and eardrum area(s) sufficiently without anesthesia.
2. The longer (chronic) the infection has been present, the more difficult it is to clear up. In severe long-standing infections, surgery may be necessary to correct the problem. Chronic ear problems may not be curable, but manageable. Therefore, periodic rechecks may be required on a regular basis in order to ensure good results and control of the problem. Periodic rechecks are necessary to review, or modify treatment, and possibly change medication(s) etc. Should resistance develop, a different medication may be required. Also, clients generally don't always remember or comprehend completely the entire treatment procedure(s), instructions etc. There are many important steps to ensuring complete control. In order to achieve the best results, a "plan" has to be followed emphasizing periodic ear checks to review such procedures. Remember that you want to build on your treatment success, not to wait until the problem(s) recur and have to start over. Be progressive...Not regressive!
3. Again, to be effective, the medication must contact microorganisms or mites deep within the ear(s) canal. To achieve this contact, the ear canal must be clear of debris, hair, wax etc., and the medication must be placed deep within the canal. Please call the office if you are having trouble treating your pet's ear or should debris, wax, hair, odor, shaking or pawing at the ears persist or recur, thereby inhibiting good results.
4. Following anesthesia, cleansing and flushing, it is very important for home care and treatment to be followed diligently and accurately as instructed. Remember that we have only cleaned the ear out, you need to medicate the ear to remove the infection. Therefore, success depends mainly upon how well you follow through at home.
5. Routine rechecks between 3 and 4 weeks, after flushing, are generally recommended. This is encouraged for the following reasons:

- (a) Bacterial resistance to medication can occur, and therefore the infection will not go away unless the medication (antibiotics) is changed or treatment modification occurs. Occasionally an ear will require culturing and sensitivity should resistant germs persist.
 - (b) Often times, improper or mis-understood treatment techniques by the owner can be discussed and clarified.
 - (c) After treating for a period of time, the swelling is reduced, therefore enabling a better view of the ear canal and eardrum.
 - (d) Periodic maintenance and prevention can be discussed in more detail after the infection and major problems are under control and at this time a “flushing program” may be started. Look for reminder card(s) in the mail.
6. Never put any medication, rinses, alcohol, peroxide, water etc... into your pet’s ear(s) unless instructed accordingly. Alcohol will produce a painful burning sensation if used. Peroxide is an irritant. Many over-the-counter medications are inappropriate. (You also get no instructions with them).
7. Always wipe out any discharge, dirt, debris, etc., prior to applying new medication.
8. Remember the signs of ear infection:

*Odor, discharge, swelling, rubbing or pawing at the ears, shaking head etc. If these symptoms occur, have us check your pet A.S.A.P. The longer you wait, the more chronic and difficult to cure the problem becomes. The external ear canal opening swells closed over time producing a darker, warmer, moist environment etc. as mentioned above. This created a “vicious-cycle” as you can imagine.

Should you notice head tilt, circling, off-balance, or severe head-shaking following ear flushing, be sure to contact us immediately.

How to flush your pets ear(s) at home:

Wipe out the inside ear canal, as far as your finger can be inserted.

Fill the ear with the flush solution prescribed.

Massage the base of the ear canal to loosen the debris.

Tip the head and let it run-out, wipe and blot the solution/flush from the ear. (Let the pet shake its head for 2-3 minutes before blotting).

Repeat the above procedure 2-3 times consecutively (or as many times as is necessary) to ensure proper cleansing of the ear canal has occurred. (You can usually judge this by the discoloration of the flush solution).

After the last flush, tip the head, wipe and blot out thoroughly. When dry, apply the medication to fight the infection. Remember, there are generally two parts to ear home care:

- 1) Cleaning and flushing
- 2) Medicating. (*Use Daily for 3 days, then use every other day for 6 days, continue use every 3 days for 6 days, taper to every 4 days for 8 days, finish with weekly maintenance.*)

Remember that medication does no good if the ear is not clean inside.

Increased moisture from the environment (caused by bathing or swimming may allow normal ear organisms to colonize and contribute to otitis).

Hair growth will occlude opening of the ear canal, as well as fall into the ear canal, thereby contributing to poor aeration, trapping moisture debris etc.

Thank You,
Roger Paulson D.V.M.