

# Pet Parents Want to Know!

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Your pet has been diagnosed with otitis externa, or inflammation of the ear canal(s). Here are some common questions and answers to help you understand this condition.

## HOW DID MY PET GET AN EAR INFECTION?

Ear infections result when the skin of the ear canal becomes affected by some other type of skin disorder. When the ear canal becomes inflamed, it produces more wax, which gives some organisms normally found in the ear the food to grow and reproduce. An infection can start if anything foreign enters the ear canal, such as ear mites, insects, or plant material. Even hair plucking in the ears by groomers can lead to an inflammation and infection.

## WHAT KIND OF SKIN PROBLEMS CAN LEAD TO EAR INFECTIONS?

In dogs, the most common cause of ear canal inflammation is an allergy called *atopic dermatitis*. Unlike human allergies, which typically cause watery eyes and sneezing, canine allergies most often affect the dog's skin. In some dogs, the skin can be allergic to things found in the environment, such as pollens, molds, and even house dust mites found in carpet and on dog beds. Some dogs are sensitive to a certain component of their food and a trial with another type of food may help the ear disease.

## WHY DO MY DOG'S EARS SMELL BAD?

When ear disease is present, the warm, moist environment in the ear canals allows yeasts to metabolize the wax, resulting in a musty odor. When the growing bacteria break down the waxes and oils, a rancid, fishy smell occurs. If there is dead tissue in the

ear canal, odor results from the breakdown products as well. Ear cleaning helps remove smelly material in and around the ear canal.

## WHAT IS THE BEST THING TO TREAT AN EAR INFECTION?

Every dog and cat is different, so this answer is not straightforward. In some animals, each ear may have a different problem and need different treatment. Your veterinarian needs to perform examinations and evaluations to determine the best methods to treat the ear(s). A variety of products to treat ear infections are available, including ear washes, antibiotics, antifungals, and ear packings.

## HOW LONG DOES AN EAR INFECTION LAST?

If your pet is experiencing its first ear infection, the initial treatment usually lasts 2 to 3 weeks. If there is an underlying skin issue that needs to be treated, treatment can last longer. For example, if your dog is allergic during the summer months, then ear problems may last through the allergy season and subside during the winter.