

LISTEN! While we talk about

Ears



Ear problems are one of THE most common problems our dogs develop. And ear infections are very painful, as you would know if you or your baby ever had one!

Ear problems/infections can occur extremely acutely (within hours or even one day)! But, they can also turn into chronic and serious ongoing problems if not treated properly!

Healthy ears are clean ears, with no smell and certainly no discharge. Smell your dog's ears, so you know the difference between healthy and infected.

The most common ear infections are caused by a yeast organism called Malassezia (which can also affect your dog's skin). There will be a very dark discharge and a rank sour smelling odour.

There are also other organisms/bacteria that can occur and often there will be a combination of bugs causing the ear infection.

Hence the treatment is tailored to your dog's cause of Otitis Externa (the technical name for an ear infection that hasn't gone deeper).

There are also dogs more prone to ear infections! These include breeds with hairy ear canals, bad anatomical construction of the ears, and especially dogs with very hairy and/or floppy ears - eg. Schnauzers, many Oodles, Shar Peis, Spaniels, Bassets etc.

If you have any of these breeds, it is beneficial to use regular (fortnightly) ear cleaning preparations you can buy from your Vet or Pet store.

Ear problems are painful and if unresolved they can become chronic, with the skin in the canals changing. This can mean surgery will possibly need to be performed as well as topical therapy.

3 Sections of a Dog's Ear

Ears are composed of three parts.....External ear canal, Middle ear, Inner ear. Problems with ears are very common especially in the external part. Dogs' ears are different from our ears.

✓ 1. External ear canal

From the ear hole they have a vertical canal section, then a right angle bend to the horizontal section and then the ear drum at the end. In a large breed of dog the length of this canal can be as much as 3-4 centimetres long!

This is the section of the ear which most commonly becomes infected. It is also where you will notice discharge, smelly ears, redness and it is painful. Healthy ears should not look manky or smell sour or gross!

This is the section that your Vet can visualise with an instrument called an Otoscope and also where samples of swabs can be taken to help diagnosis of what particular bugs are causing the infection, hence the correct treatment prescribed.

✓ 2. Middle ear

This section is internal, beyond the ear drum. It cannot be visualised except on X-ray or other imaging! It is the part that transmits vibrations from the ear drum to the inner ear. It is an important part of hearing. This part is what "blocks" when we go in an aeroplane and hence we need to "pop our ears" by holding our nose and blowing!

If your dog has a middle ear infection there will be pain and a deafness or dulling of hearing. Middle ear infections are more difficult to treat but fortunately are less common.

✓ 3. Inner ear

This is the deepest part of the ear, the cochlear. It is responsible for transmitting sounds to the brain for hearing to occur and also for balance. This part is also not visible. If this part is not working, your dog will be deaf.

Older dogs can also develop (usually an acute condition) called Idiopathic Vestibular (balance and hearing) Syndrome (IVS). It can be distressing to see, since your dog loses its balance and can't walk properly, stumbles, falls. They often have a head tilt, they cannot straighten. They also usually have Nystagmus, where their eyes flicker from side to side. It is thought to be because of a mini stroke. Fortunately, much as it looks dire, it usually resolves with treatment, time, and nursing through this phase.

Ears are complex with different functions. But, all ear infections are very painful and need treatment asap. If you think your dog is deaf, remember also that they maybe are just being naughty and ignoring your commands! Sneaky!

In short, if your dog's ears are smelly, there is discharge, they are scratching at their ears, please take them to your Vet for diagnosis and treatment of the infection.



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