

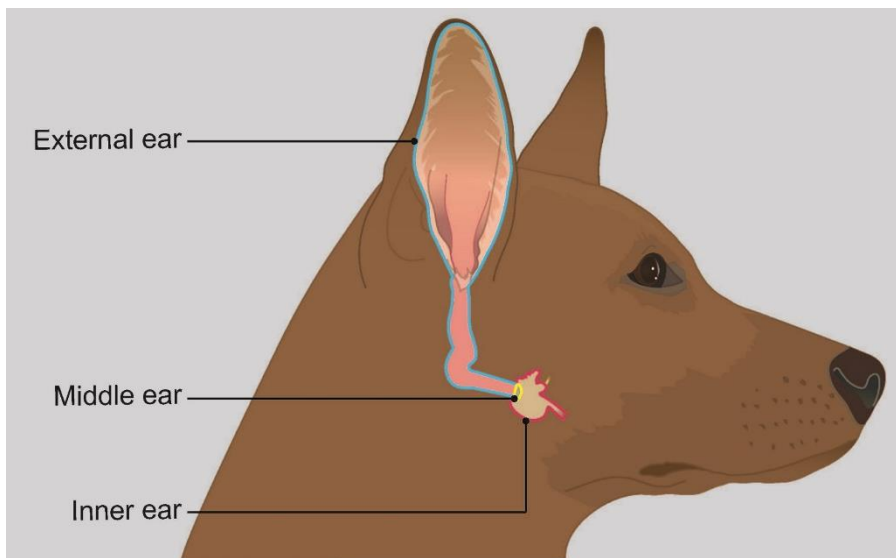
# Ear infections in dogs

## Overview

- If your dog has an ear infection, it's likely to be caused by bacteria or yeast (or both).
- It's rare for ear infections to develop without an underlying cause - such as ear mites or a skin allergy.
- Ear scratching, pain and head shaking are common symptoms.
- Ear infections are very painful so rapid treatment by a vet is essential.
- **Book an appointment with your vet if you suspect your dog has an ear infection.**

## Types of ear infection

This article focuses on external ear infections, (the most common type of ear infection). However, there are three parts of the ear that can develop infections.



1. External ear infections
2. Middle ear infection
3. Inner ear infections

## Symptoms

- Head shaking
- Scratching their ear(s)
- Red, swollen, hot and painful ear(s)
- Smelly ear(s)
- Discharge coming from the ear(s)
- Rubbing their head along the ground
- Scabs and crusting on the side of their face
- A swelling in their ear flap (aural haematoma)
- Loss or reduced hearing

Infection affecting the middle or inner ear (the part of the ear that helps with balance) may cause:

- Head tilt (carrying head on one side)
- Loss of balance

## Causes

Bacteria and yeast live in all healthy ears and only cause problems if something enables them to overgrow, such as:

- Ear mites (common in puppies)
- Allergic skin disease (i.e. to food or pollen)
- Trapped water
- Excessive cleaning or ear plucking by owner

- Injuries
- Something stuck in the ear canal (like a grass seed)
- Narrow, hairy or dirty ear canals

## When to contact your vet

Book an appointment with your vet if you notice any of the symptoms above - ear infections are very painful.

If you see any signs of an inner ear infection (such as loss of balance or a head tilt), contact your vet straight away - this type of infection can be much more serious.

Be sure to tell your vet if your dog has had more than two to three ear infections in its life.

**You know your dog best. If they don't have the symptoms listed above but you are still concerned it's always best to contact your vet.**

## Treatment

Your vet may recommend some of the following treatments:

### Ear cleaning

- Cleaning your dog's ears with a veterinary ear cleaner will help get rid of waxy discharge and ensure ear drops work properly.

### Ear drops

- Most ear drops combat bacteria, yeast, inflammation and pain.
- If your dog is given ear drops, it's important to follow instructions carefully and complete the course (even if

they seem better after a couple of days). This will ensure the infection doesn't return.

### **Anti-inflammatory pain relief**

- Anti-inflammatory drugs help with swelling and pain.

### **Antibiotic tablets**

- Antibiotic tablets aren't always necessary but are occasionally given (at the same time as drops) if the infection is severe.

### **Other treatment**

- If there is something stuck in the ear canal your pet may need an operation to remove it.
- If your dog is suffering from skin allergies that cause problems with their ears, they may improve with specific treatment for the allergy and/or a change in diet.
- Take your dog back for check up's as regularly as your vet suggests. Your vet will make sure the infection is clearing, some ear infections take several weeks to get better.

## **Outlook**

Most ear infections will clear quickly after a short course of treatment from your vet. Some, that have been grumbling on for a while can take a few weeks to clear and in some rare cases, surgery is necessary.

### **Some dogs are prone to ear infections and need lifelong ear care.**

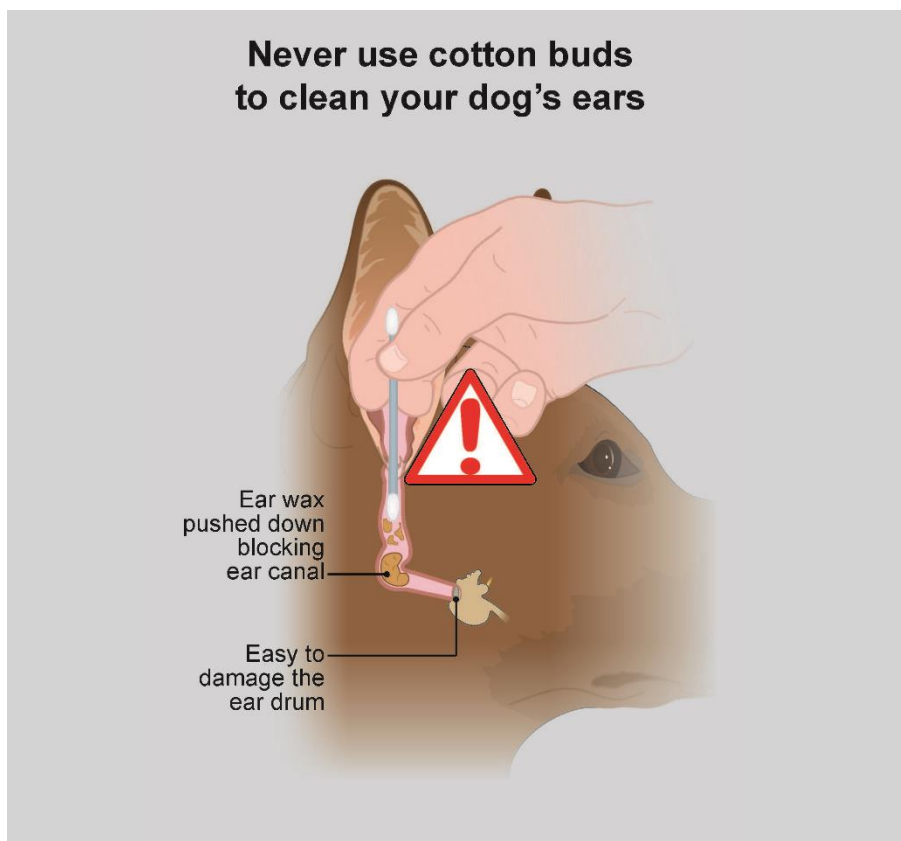
If your dog is suffering regularly from ear infections, your vet may want to examine them under anaesthetic.

## Prevention

Regularly check your dog's ears so that you spot problems quickly. Get used to the smell of your dog's ears when they are healthy. If they are infected they will smell sour or pungent.

### Ear cleaning

- Healthy ears keep themselves clean. However, if your dog has mucky ears your vet may ask you to clean them at home.
- Ask your vet or vet nurse to show you how to check and clean your dog's ears, or watch our video.



Take a look at our video: 'HOW TO: Clean your dog's ears'  
[www.pdsa.org.uk/earinfections](http://www.pdsa.org.uk/earinfections)

### **Swimming**

- If your dog develops ear infections after swimming, it can help to clean their ears after they go into the water.

### **Grooming**

- Dogs with particularly hairy ear canals may need them trimmed and/or plucked to ensure they don't develop infections. Ask your vet for advice on this.

### **Treat skin conditions**

- Skin health is particularly important when it comes to preventing ear infections.
- It's important to treat any other conditions such as skin allergies (atopy) and prevent conditions such as fleas or ear mites.

Published: July 2018