



AVENUES PET CLINIC  
5520 Yellowstone Road  
Cheyenne, WY 82009

Telephone: (307) 778-3007  
Fax: (307) 638-7718  
www.avenuespetclinic.com



## Ear Infections (Otitis Externa)

A dog's ear canal has a vertical and a horizontal component. This structure predisposes dogs to ear infections as debris must work its way upward rather than straight out.

Ear disease usually stems from over-production of wax, which occurs in response to irritation. Allergic skin disease affecting the ears is one possible cause, especially in recurring cases; other causes of ear infections include ear mites; foreign bodies such as grass awns or foxtails; or hair growth deep in the canal. The moisture of the wax promotes bacterial growth and infection. Soon wax in the ears is joined by pus.

It isn't long before the pet is seen scratching at his ears, shaking his head or holding one ear slightly dropped. Discharge and odor may be noticeable to people.

### Complications of Ear Infection

If the infection reaches the middle ear, affected animals may have a head tilt, a lack of balance, and unusual back-and-forth eye movements called nystagmus. These symptoms are called vestibular signs and represent a complication of middle ear infection. Middle ear infections can also cause paralysis of the facial nerve, leading to a slack-jawed appearance on that side of the face.

### Aural Hematoma

When a dog with uncomfortable ears shakes and scratches vigorously, a blood vessel in the earflap may rupture. This leads to bleeding into the tissues of the pinna. The usual recommendation is to have the blood clots removed and to bandage and clean the ear under anesthesia.

### Treating Ear Infections

#### Step One:

Most ear infections are cleared up simply with professional cleaning followed by medication at home. If there is only mild debris in the ear canals, simple disinfection and washing of the ear is adequate; however, in many cases, a full ear flush is needed to even examine the eardrum. For patient comfort, we recommend sedation for this procedure as the ears are sore and the instruments can be damaging if the pet jumps at the wrong time. A sample of ear discharge is commonly examined under the microscope to assist in selecting medications for home use. After a couple of weeks of home treatment, the ear canals are rechecked to be sure the infection is gone. In most cases this completes treatment but for stubborn cases, we must proceed to the next step.

#### Step Two:

Some dogs have chronic ear problems in which the infection is not controlled by general medication or returns when general medication is discontinued. In these cases, the ear discharge should be cultured so that the precise organism can be pinpointed and treated specifically. Regular treatment at home with disinfecting ear washes should become part of the pet's grooming routine.

Further testing may be in order to determine why the infection continues to recur. Allergy is the most

common reason for recurrent ear problems, but hormone imbalances can also be underlying causes.

### Step Three:

Some ear infections simply cannot be controlled with the above steps. Depending on the severity of the problem, the vertical canal may need to be opened surgically. This enables debris to be removed more effectively. This is done to prevent severe scarring after prolonged specific medical therapy has been ineffective.

If the canal becomes so scarred that it is practically closed, ablation may be the final option. In this surgical procedure, the entire ear canal is removed and healthy tissue is allowed to grow in. These procedures are last resorts after severe infection has made effective medical treatment impossible. A specialist is called in for these cases, and although surgery is expensive, dogs with chronic severe otitis usually require no further ear treatment for the rest of their lives.

**Ear infections can be especially frustrating as they have the ability to draw out for months, even years, even with the best of treatment.**

**It is important to have a logical approach, to know what sort of infection is in the ear, to do proper home care regularly, and to have regular recheck appointments.**

**If a patient has a history of particularly stubborn ear infections or numerous recurrences, treatment focus shifts to prevention, such as weekly ear disinfection, once the acute infection is eliminated.**