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Full article

Ear Mites and other Aural Issues

Does your cat have dirty ears? Does your dog shake their head or scratch at their ears? Do they tilt their head or fail to notice you coming and going? They may be suffering from an ear infection...

The causes of Ear problems are varied!

[Ear mites](#), excessive hair, moisture or wax, foreign bodies, [allergies](#) and [hypothyroidism](#) can all be contributing factors in the development of ear issues. Breed characteristics and genetics may be involved. Because the [ear canal](#) in [dogs](#) and cats is mostly vertical (unlike a human ear), it is easy for debris and moisture to collect in the ear canal.

What Are Symptoms of Ear issues?

Ear infections in dogs and cats are common and I find it often on routine exam. Most dogs suffer from this painful condition sometime in their life, and cats often "suffer in silence". Scratching and rubbing at the ear(s) and head shaking or head tilt are common signs.

You may also notice:

- Brown, yellow, or bloody discharge
- Odor (yeasty or musty smell)
- Redness and swelling
- Crusts or scabs on inside of the outer ear
- Hair loss around the ear

Healthy cat ears are clean! If they aren't – they probably have mites. Often owners don't notice this --

- "dirty ears" or brown spotting on the inside

Severe ear problems may be debilitating and painful, lead to aural hematoma (fluid swelling of the outer ear), balance problems (circling, tripping and unusual eye movements) and hearing loss.

Occasionally a sample from the affected ear is necessary (to be examined under the microscope or sent to a lab), and sometimes blood testing if allergies or hormonal issues are involved. Intransigent ear problems can be quite the challenge for owner and veterinarian. But they respond well to a veterinarians directed care.

Treatment for cat infections

I have seen cats with severe ear infections and ear trauma as a complication of untreated ear mites. A simple treatment with ear drops or "flea-treatment" usually solves the problem. I find a great number of cats suffer from ear mites and other inflections here in the Arava and I recommend preventative every 3 months.

Treatment for dog-ear infections

For a start, successful treatment begins with a gentle cleanser. The ear is often painful, and getting the cleaning solution in and for long enough may be a "team" effort, In some cases loose cotton or a cotton ball may help expedite the process, allowing the fluid to go back and forth in the canal, absorb excess solution and collect the debris as it comes up. Personally, I prefer to do ear cleaning outside: gently massage the ear at the base after applying the solution and after a minute or so let your animal shake their head. As long as your dog tolerates it, a few repeats of the procedure may be necessary to achieve the desired results.

Don't do's:

- 1) Don't use Q-Tip swabs as they may push debris deeper into the ear canal and rupture the eardrum.
- 2) Do not use rubbing alcohol or other solutions that are irritating to inflamed skin (the skin inside the ear of a dog with an ear infection is like a rash).

Often a regular routine of ear cleaning is enough to solve ear issues, but your veterinarian may prescribe medicated ointment or drops. Allow the ear to dry for approximately 10 minutes, and then instill the medication. The length of treatment depends on the patient, severity of infection, and any changes to the ear (e.g. thickening of the tissue in the ear). In some cases oral medications are necessary (antibiotics, anti-yeast, anti-inflammatory), and possibly surgical intervention. Your veterinarian will schedule rechecks to make sure the treatment is appropriate for your animal, that they are recovering as expected and the infection is gone.

Prevention of ear infection in dogs and cats

Here are some things to keep in mind:

- 1) Ear canals become moist from bathing, grooming or swimming. This moisture fosters the growth of microorganisms in the ear canal. Prevention in these cases can be as simple as cleaning the ear to remove the moisture...
- 2) Regular parasite preventive treatment. This is especially important in cats (and rabbits and other cage-pets)

Occasionally, an underlying cause may be difficult to identify. Your animal may suffer from allergies (environmental such as grass, tree or weed pollens, dust mites, molds or food allergies such as beef, chicken or soy) which predispose to ear infections. Other medical issues may be playing a role. But even in these cases a routine cleaning with a gentle ear cleaner may help reduce the frequency and intensity and help your animal live a more comfortable life.

Do not underestimate follow-up treatment. A regular ear-care routine will help keep your pet healthy and free from discomfort! Good ear care may require weekly, quarterly, or half-yearly visits...

Just as you keep on top of your own health, stay informed about your pet's health. Ultimately, you are the best advocate for your pet's health care.

