

Aintree
Head & Neck
Practice
Development
Unit

Otitis Externa

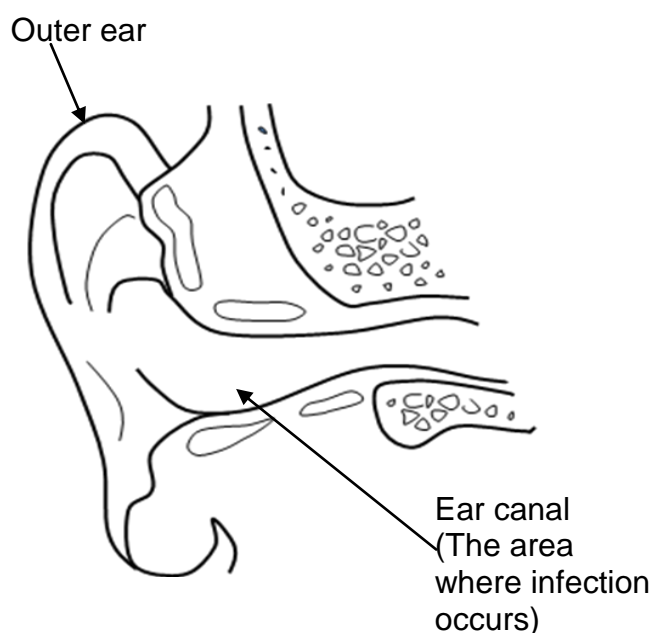
NHS

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What is otitis externa?

- Otitis externa is an inflammatory condition of the ear canal which is a tube between the outer ear and the ear drum (see diagram).
- Otitis externa is classified as either infective or reactive.
- Depending on the type and severity of the condition symptoms may vary from an itch and some discomfort to extreme pain within the ear.
- The onset of otitis externa is usually sudden. It affects all ages and may involve one or both ears.



What causes otitis externa?

Several factors may contribute towards an episode of otitis externa.

- Allowing the ears to get wet during bathing, showering or swimming.
- Excessive heat and humidity.
- Using hair clips, cotton buds etc to clean the ears could result in trauma and damage to the delicate skin lining of the ear canal and initiate the onset of infection.
- People who have conditions such as dermatitis, eczema and psoriasis are at greater risk of developing otitis externa.

Infective otitis externa

- In general the infections are caused by a bacterial infection.
- Occasionally they can be due to a fungal infection or viral.

Bacterial otitis externa

Bacterial otitis externa can be wet or dry.

- In wet otitis externa, frequently known as swimmers ear, a discharge is noticed which may be watery or white.
- A swollen canal with the discharge may temporarily reduce hearing and pain is usually experienced.
- Sometimes the glands in the neck or behind the ear become enlarged and are tender to touch.

Dry otitis externa

- Dry otitis externa is a hair follicle which may become infected in the outer portion of the ear canal.
- This condition is extremely painful particularly when the ear is manipulated.
- No discharge is noticed unless the infection bursts.

Otitis externa is also seen as a result of infection of chronic middle ear disease where discharge enters the ear canal through a perforated ear drum.

Reactive otitis externa

Dermatological conditions as mentioned earlier may flare up causing otitis externa so too can an allergic reaction to ear drops.

How is otitis externa treated?

- Treatment of otitis externa depends on the symptoms.

- A wick impregnated with ear drops or cream may be inserted to a swollen canal and repeated until the swelling subsides.
- To increase the effectiveness of treatment the doctor or nurse may clean your ear free of debris using suction.
- A course of ear drops, spray or cream may be prescribed. It is important to use the treatment as directed and to complete the course.

- Paracetamol and ibuprofen are usually adequate pain relief.

Applying a warmed flannel to the ear may also ease the pain.

How can I prevent further episodes of otitis externa?

- Keep the ears dry.
- When bathing or showering smear cotton wool with “Vaseline” and place into the ear, this will prevent water entering.

During an episode of otitis externa it is advised to abstain from swimming.

Once swimming is resumed take precautions by using either ear plugs or a tight fitting bathing cap.

- Do not clean the ears with any implements as this may cause further damage.

**If symptoms persist, contact
ENT appointments on 0151
529 0358**

Further Information

Aintree ENT Outpatients
Department Elective Care
Centre

Tel:

0151 529 0358

0151 529 0357

Ward 28:- 0151 529 5239

Ward 29:- 0151 529 5195

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