

## What is otitis externa?

- Otitis externa is also called "swimmer's ear" or an "outer ear infection."
- It is an infection of the outer ear canal.

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## What causes it?

- The infection is caused by bacteria or fungi.
- Water often has bacteria in it.
- After swimming, water sometimes stays pooled in the ear.
- Bacteria may start to grow and cause an infection.
- Bacteria are most likely to be found in rivers, lakes, and ponds.
- Swimming pools can also cause infection. The chlorine can dry out the skin and the ears can get more easily infected.
- It is most common in the summer months (when children swim the most).

## Who can get it?

- It is most common in children and young adults who swim or dive a lot.
- Children who have stuck something in the ear, possibly cutting or scratching it, are more likely to get an ear infection.
- Children who have ears with dry skin or lots of wax in their ears are more likely to get an infection.

## What are the signs and symptoms?

- The first symptom is often an itching in the ear.
- The ear may feel plugged.
- The most common symptom is ear pain.
- The pain often gets worse when the outer part of the ear or earlobe is touched.
- Pus, a greenish-yellow fluid, may drain from the ear.
- There may be some hearing loss.
- Children may have a fever.
- Neck glands may become swollen.

## Is it contagious?

- No. It is not contagious.

## How is it treated?

- If your child has symptoms of an ear infection, take her to the doctor.
- The doctor may prescribe eardrops.
- Have your child tilt her head to the side so her infected ear is facing up. Put in the drops.
- If the doctor prescribes oral antibiotics (by mouth), have your child take them as long as advised, even if her symptoms start to get better before the medicine is gone.
- The doctor might recommend acetaminophen for pain.
- Putting a warm cloth or heating pad against her ear may help ease pain.
- While you child has the infection, keep water, soap, shampoo, and other irritating items out of her ear.
- She may need to use a shower cap or earplugs.
- Avoid swimming for two weeks after the infection is gone. If your child swims sooner than that, use tightly fitting earplugs.

## How long does it last?

- Pain may last or even increase for the first 12 to 24 hours after treatment begins.
- With treatment, the pain usually goes away in 3 to 4 days.
- The infection is usually gone after two weeks.

### Can it be prevented?

- Do not stick objects in the ear (such as cotton swabs, bobby pins, or pencils), even to try to clean it. The objects may scratch the skin and open it up for infection.
- Keep the ears clean and dry.
- Put petroleum jelly on pieces of cotton to use as earplugs for swimming or showering.
- To dry out the ears, put rubbing alcohol on a piece of cotton and place it in the ear.
- You can also dry the ears out with eardrops from the store, like SwimEar or Aqua Ear.
- Children who have ears with dry skin or lots of wax in their ears may need to get their ears cleaned out by a doctor. Do this every year before swimming season.

### When should I call the doctor?


- Call the doctor if your child has symptoms of an ear infection.
- Call the doctor if she still has symptoms of an ear infection after two weeks of treatment.
- Call the doctor if your child has any hearing loss.
- Call the doctor if fluid drains from the ear, especially if it is thick, a strange color, bloody, or if it smells bad.
- Call the doctor if you have questions or concerns about your child's treatment or condition.

### Quick Answers

- Otitis externa is also sometimes called "swimmer's ear" or an "outer ear infection."
- After swimming, water sometimes stays pooled in the ear. If there is bacteria in the water, it could cause infection.
- It is most common in children and young adults who swim or dive a lot.
- The infection may cause itching, a feeling of plugged ears, some hearing loss, or pain.
- It is not contagious.
- If your child has symptoms of an ear infection, take her to the doctor. The doctor may prescribe eardrops or antibiotics.
- With treatment, pain usually goes away in 3 to 4 days. The infection is usually gone after two weeks.
- To prevent ear infections, avoid sticking objects in the ear, even cotton swabs. Keep the ears clean and dry.
- Call the doctor if you have questions or concerns about your child's treatment or condition.

### References

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