



Ear Disease in Dogs and Cats

Ear disease is very common in pets, especially dogs. Pets can have either one or both ears affected. Signs can range from severe and painful to mild and not even noticeable.

Common signs of ear disease are:

- Scratching at the ears
- Shaking the head
- Excessive discharge from one or both ears
- Painful ear/s
- Bad smell from the ear/s

Common causes of ear disease are:

- Skin allergies
- Excessive moisture
- Excessive hair growth
- Ear anatomy (see below)/design - pendulous ears (Spaniels, Basset Hounds etc)
- Foreign objects eg grass seed

These causes lead to infection with yeasts and/or bacteria which causes the pain, swelling and smelly discharge.

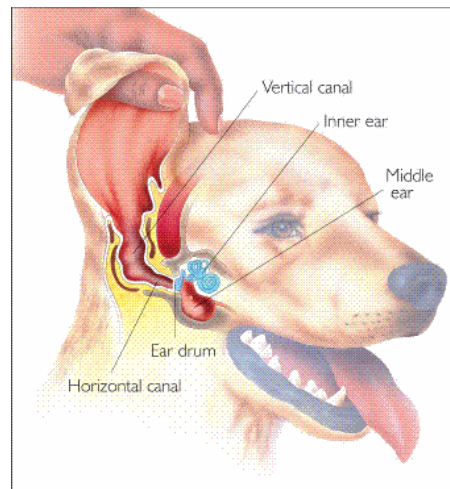
Dog's Ear Anatomy:

One of the biggest problems with dog's ears is their actual anatomy makes infections easy to brew and hard to get rid of.

As you can see from the picture, the ear you see from the outside is only a small part.

The actual ear canal is 'L' shaped. It travels down 1-3cm (vertical canal) before turning a corner towards the head for another 1-2cm (horizontal canal).

This blind tunnel is a perfect place for bugs to thrive.



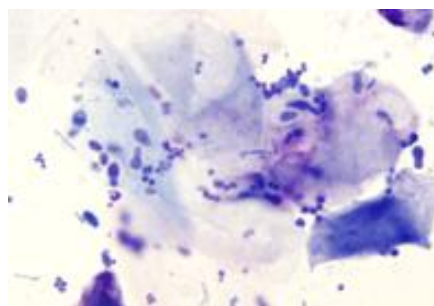
How Can the Vet Help?

The vet will try to look down the canal with special scope to see what is going on. This can be difficult when the pet has sore ears.

The vet then needs to take a swab sample from the deep part of the ear canal and examine it under the microscope to be able to actually see the bugs (yeasts and/or bacteria) growing in the ear.

This test is called **cytology**. An example of what the vet might see under the microscope is shown in the picture. Based on this test the vet can often recommend some medication.

Sometimes the bacteria we see look nastier than the common ones and we won't know how best to treat it until a special swab is sent away to the lab for testing.



Mixed yeast and bacterial infection

How Can I Help?

Your job is especially important. Applying ear drops the right way is vital. You need to make sure the medication gets right down the bottom of the ear canal. There is a good instructional video demonstrating drop application at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZQ4aJUGaZ9E>

It is also important to use any pain relief or antibiotic medication as directed and use an ear cleaner as well if the vet has recommended this.

Why Do I Need To Keep Coming For Revisits?

Revisits are so important because the only way to be sure the infection is actually gone is to have the cytology test to make sure all the bugs are gone. The ear may look much better, even normal but there is no way to determine this without checking that deep part of the ear canal.

Also, some bacteria may become resistant to the initial medication which will make the infection worse. If this happens, a special swab needs to be taken for culture in the lab.

Why Does My Pet Keep Getting Ear Problems?

Recurrent ear problems are extremely frustrating for both you and your pet. The most likely causes of repeated problems are:

- The infection not being completely resolved in the first place (see revisit section above)
- There is an underlying problem
 - Lifestyle factors eg swimming
 - Excessive hair growth
 - Allergies
 - Thyroid problem
 - Polyp or tumour
- There are chronic changes in the ear canal
 - Narrowed ear canal
 - Excess tissue growth

Problems such as these need further investigation and other treatments to help manage the problem of repeated ear infections.