ANIMAL HEALTH CLINIC

EAR MITES IN CATS & DOGS

A simple guide to understanding, recognizing, treating, and preventing ear mites

Ear mites are tiny, contagious parasites that live on the surface of the skin, most often inside the ear canal. The species most often found in cats and dogs is *Otodectes cynotis*. They are more common in cats, especially kittens, but dogs of any age can get them too.

WHAT ARE EAR MITES?

- Microscopic-to-tiny parasites that feed on skin debris and ear wax.
- They can cause intense itching and irritation in the ear canals.
- They spread mainly through close contact with an infested animal.
- Cats, dogs, and some other animals can carry them.

COMMON SYMPTOMS

- Frequent head shaking or tilting.
- Scratching, rubbing, or pawing at the ears.
- Red, irritated, painful, or sensitive ears.
- Dark brown or black, crumbly “coffee-ground” debris.
- Scabs, hair loss, or sores from scratching.
- Odor or discharge if a secondary infection develops.

HOW ARE EAR MITES DIAGNOSED?

Ear infections, allergies, and other ear problems can look similar, so symptoms alone cannot confirm ear mites.

Your veterinarian will examine your pet’s ears and may look at a sample of ear debris under a microscope. An otoscope may also be used to inspect the ear canal and look for mites or other problems.

TREATMENT

- Your veterinarian will recommend a mite-killing medication that is safe for your pet’s species, age, and health.
- Treatment may be applied in the ears or as a topical product on the skin, depending on the medication.
- Your pet may also need ear cleaning or medication for a secondary bacterial or yeast infection.
- Follow the exact directions and complete the full treatment plan—even if the itching improves.
- A recheck may be recommended to make sure the mites and any infection have cleared.

PREVENTION

- Keep pets away from animals known to have ear mites until treatment is complete.
- If one pet is diagnosed, ask your veterinarian about examining and treating all cats and dogs that have had close contact.
- Ask whether your pet’s regular flea or parasite prevention also protects against ear mites.
- Check your pet’s ears regularly for itching, redness, odor, or unusual debris.
- Wash bedding and clean shared brushes or grooming tools.

IMPORTANT SAFETY TIPS

Do not use over-the-counter insecticides, dog products on cats, oils, peroxide, alcohol, or home remedies unless your veterinarian specifically recommends them. Some products can be harmful or worsen irritation. Do not put cotton swabs deep into the ear canal.

WHEN TO CONTACT YOUR VETERINARIAN

Arrange an exam if you notice ear scratching, head shaking, discharge, or odor. Seek prompt veterinary care for severe pain, bleeding, marked swelling, a head tilt, or trouble with balance.

Questions about your pet’s ears? Contact Animal Health Clinic—we’re happy to help.

Educational information only. Your veterinarian should examine your pet and recommend an individual treatment plan. Sources: Companion Animal Parasite Council, “Otodectic Mite”; Merck Veterinary Manual, “Ear Mites” in dogs and cats; VCA Animal Hospitals, “Ear Mites in Cats and Dogs.”