

## Ear disease in your dog

Ear disease is very common in dogs. It can be painful and needs to be treated. Some dogs have chronic ear disease and may need life-long treatment or even surgery to relieve the symptoms.

### Has my dog got ear disease?

Common signs of ear disease are head shaking, rubbing the ears, and a smelly discharge. Other symptoms include a head tilt, pain on touching the ear, loss of balance or a change in behaviour.

### Why do dogs get ear disease?

The ear canal in the dog is very long. Additionally many breeds have big floppy ears, which make the ear canal warm and humid. If the ear canal becomes irritated, for example by a grass seed, ear mites or an allergy, then it can become infected with yeast and bacteria very quickly.

### Why does my dog have to see the vet?

Due to the many causes of ear disease, the vet has to examine your dog to prescribe the correct medication. This is especially important if your dog keeps getting recurrent ear infections or if the original treatment did not work as there is often an underlying reason for this which needs to be addressed.

### How is ear disease treated?

The vet will need to look down your dog's ear with an otoscope and may take samples of the discharge from the ear. Ear cleaner and/or medicated ear drops are likely to be prescribed. The cleaner removes debris from the ear canal so that the medication reaches the skin. Sometimes the ear canal will need to be cleaned under general anaesthesia.

### I have some old ear drops at home, can I use them?

#### **This not a good idea because**

1. The current ear infection your dog is suffering from could have a different cause.
2. There is likely to be an underlying cause of the recurrent ear infection that needs to be addressed.
3. Repeated applications of antibiotics to a chronically infected ear will result in antibiotic-resistant bacteria growing.

### What happens if I don't treat ear disease?

Once an infection has taken hold it is very unlikely to be cleared without help. The ear canal will swell and become scarred, predisposing your dog to further ear infections. The ear drum may burst allowing the infection to spread into the middle ear, which could cause neurological damage.

### Why does my dog keep getting ear infections?

Your dog may have long floppy ears that reduce air flow to the ear canal, he/she may swim a lot, or he/she may produce too much wax. Dogs that have skin allergies or hormonal conditions are predisposed to skin and ear disease. In many dogs an ear infection is a one-off event that can be easily treated. Unfortunately some dogs will suffer from recurrent ear infections. The longer an ear infection is left, the more damaged the ear canal becomes and the less likely it is to return to normal.

Recently more and more antibiotic-resistant infections are being detected in dogs' ears. These infections are caused by inadequate treatment of chronic infections, especially by long-term antibiotic misuse. It is everyone's responsibility to keep the few antibiotics we have safe, and therefore vets must be more careful about the medications they prescribe. Please help us by bringing your dog to see the vet as soon as possible, and please do not use out-of-date ear drops.