

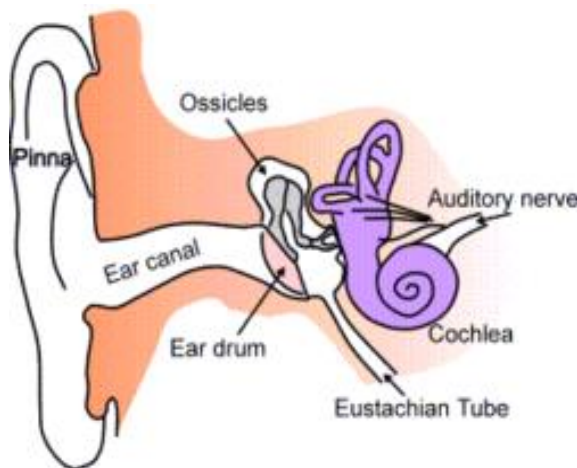


PATIENT INFORMATION

Otitis Externa (Infection of the ear canal)

What is otitis externa?

Otitis externa is an inflammation of the ear canal and often occurs 'out of the blue' but maybe due to infection or irritation.



What are the symptoms of otitis externa?

Itching is the most common symptom. This can then lead to a discharge from the ear or dull hearing. If untreated this can develop into pain and swelling of the outside of the ear.

What causes otitis externa?

Some people are prone to this condition, particularly if you suffer from psoriasis or eczema. When water enters the ear canal when showering, bathing or swimming it may cause you to itch or scratch your ear. This damages the skin in the ear canal, and inflammation then may occur.

The inflamed skin can quickly become infected with bacteria or fungi that live on the surface of healthy skin. It is only when this skin is damaged can infection set in.

A 'vicious circle' may develop. The inflammation causes more itching, which in turn causes you to scratch more making the situation worse and so on.

What is the treatment for otitis externa?

A course of ear drops or a spray is usually sufficient to treat this condition. This may vary between 10 days to 1 month depending on the infection involved.

It is vital to the treatment of otitis externa that the drops or spray are used correctly.

When installing the drop ensure that you give yourself time to complete the treatment. This takes 20 minutes per ear 3 times a day.

Keep the ear dry. You should not immerse your head in water until the infection is settled. When preparing to shower or bathe place a piece of cotton wool dipped in vaseline into the entrance of the ear canal.

Paracetamol or ibuprofen will usually ease any discomfort. If your pain is not relieved you may need stronger painkillers, from your GP.

Further treatment may be needed if the inflammation has not resolved and the symptoms persist. The ear canal may need to be cleaned several times. This is carried out using gentle suctioning. It is advised that you do not have your ears syringed during the healing process.

If the ear canal is too swollen for the drops to penetrate easily it may be necessary to place a gauze wick into the canal which will enable the drops to be absorbed right to the end of the canal.

Antibiotics are sometimes needed if the infection is severe, particularly if it has spread from inside the ear to surrounding skin.

How can I prevent it coming back?

Unfortunately there is no guarantee that this will not happen again. The aim is to reduce the risk of re-infection.

It is important not to damage the delicate lining of the ear canal. Using cotton buds or finger tips to scratch the canal can break the skin and in turn causes inflammation to occur. The use of cotton buds also interferes with the self cleaning mechanism of the ear.

You will need to stop swimming until the infection has settled and will need to use ear plugs to keep the water out of your ear.

Please note that the information in this leaflet is to be used as a guide only. Each individual's needs will be discussed by the Nursing Staff and Doctors.

If you need any further assistance or information please contact:

Head & Neck Practitioner

01803 655739

Or

Forrest ward

01803 655507