



## OTITIS EXTERNA

Otitis externa (outer ear infection) is a very common problem in dogs and to a lesser extent cats. Atopic dermatitis is the most common cause of ear infections in the dog. (*see atopic dermatitis advice sheet.*)

### Problems that can predispose to ear infections:

- Pendulous pinnas
- Congenitally narrow ear canals or narrow ear canals due to recurrent infections causing scarring
- Hairy ear canals – in these cases it may be necessary to pluck them
- Excessive wax production
- Swimming

### Causes of ear infections:

- Atopic dermatitis
- Foreign bodies e.g. grass seeds
- Ear mites
- Food allergies
- Ear canal polyps or tumours
- Hypothyroidism

### Clinical signs

If your pet has an ear infection they may shake their head, have smelly ears, scratch at their face and rub their ears along the floor. The outside of their ears may be hot and brown or yellow discharge may be visible.

### Diagnosis

A diagnosis can be made when the vet uses an otoscope to look down your dog's vertical and horizontal ear canal. It is only possible to visualise the vertical canal with the naked eye and not the



horizontal canal or ear drum. We can then assess the amount and type of discharge present, look for an underlying cause and assess the ear drum. We may take a sample of the discharge and look at it under the microscope to see what may be causing the infection.

#### Treatment:

- **Ear drops** – Ear drops contain anti-inflammatory, anti-fungal and antibiotic agents and are used in the ear to treat the infection and reduce itching. We will show you how to use the drops and tell you how often and for how long to use them. You will need to bring your pet back weekly for us to check the horizontal canal to ensure that it is clear before it is safe to stop the drops. Sometimes ear drops will be ineffective and in these cases we may recommend other tests like sampling the discharge and growing the bacteria present, or flushing the ears under sedation.
- **Ear cleaner** – Ear cleaners are used to flush away any discharge and allow the medicated drops to work better. There are several different types of ear cleaners and the cleaner we choose and how often you use it will depend on the volume and type of discharge.

**Nothing other than ear cleaner or ear drops must ever go in or around the ear!!!!**

#### How does atopic dermatitis/food allergy cause ear infections?

In a normal dog's ear, the healthy skin cells have small hairs on their surface that waft any wax produced out of the ear. If a dog's skin cells are inflamed the hairs are unable to do this so wax stays in the ear leading to secondary infections with yeast and bacteria.

It is therefore very important you **routinely clean your dog's ears** using an ear cleaner recommended by us to ensure the wax doesn't build up in the ear. This will need to be done at least fortnightly depending on your dog. If you are in any doubt about how to clean your dog's ears you can book it in for a free of charge nurse consult, where they will go through what to do