

Now, Hear This!

Ear Care is Critical to Your Pet's Health

Cleaning your pet's ears on a regular basis can prevent costly and painful ear infections. The ear canal of a dog and cat is quite long and takes a turn that goes even deeper before stopping at the ear drum. Wax can build up in your pet's ear canal and lead to infections over time if you do not clean them regularly. There is always a small amount of bacteria and even yeast on the surface of our skin and our pet's skin. This includes the skin of the ear canal, as well. If the ear canal becomes clogged with wax, it can become the perfect environment for bacteria and yeast to reproduce and cause painful ear infections. If water gets into the ears, it can exacerbate the problem and lead to an infection even more quickly. This is why it is recommended that you clean your pet's ears after they have been swimming or have had a bath.

There are many over-the-counter ear cleaners, and all are formulated to break up wax in order to clean the ear canals. Some of the better ear cleaners will also help to remove water from the ears. I prefer an ear cleaner that not only removes water, but also has an antiseptic in it to control the population of bacteria and yeast in the ear canal. The best way to use an ear cleaner is to put some of the ear-cleaning liquid into the ear canal and gently massage the lower ear. This breaks up the wax and, hopefully, pushes it higher in the canal where you can reach it with a cotton ball or a cotton swab. It is not dangerous to use a cotton swab in your pet's ears as it is in a person's ear, since the pet's ear canal turns sharply

and prevents you from poking or puncturing the ear drum. However, you should still use the cotton swab carefully so that if your pet jumps or moves its head suddenly, it doesn't cause an injury. Once you have broken up the ear wax with an antiseptic ear cleaner and gentle massage, use the cotton and cotton swabs to remove the "debris" until there is no more wax or fluid in the ear.

It is a good preventative measure to clean your pet's ears regularly. Weekly is a good interval, although some pets that have narrow ear canals that are prone to infections should probably have their ears cleaned at least twice a week. Other risk factors for ear infections that require cleaning more often include large ears or pets that have lots of hair that covers the ear canals. Dog breeds that require grooming because their hair is constantly growing will also grow hair in the ear canals that needs to be removed by the groomer. If hair is not removed, it will clog the ear canal and lead to ear infections and other problems.

If your dog or cat shakes at its ears often, these may be the first signs of an ear infection. If you get close to your pet's ears and detect an unpleasant smell, he or she definitely has an ear condition, and you will want to see a veterinarian as soon as possible. A veterinarian can determine if there is indeed an infection and if it is due to bacteria, yeast, or a combination of both by looking at a swab taken from the ear under a microscope. Your veterinarian also can use tools to clean the ear well and flush wax and debris out of the deep canal so that the skin of the ear can breathe and the ear medicine prescribed will then come into contact with the infected area. If the ear infection is not detected for a long time and becomes severe, it is possible that oral antibiotics will be needed to

clear up a bacterial infection is the skin of the deep ear canal. If that skin is raw and painful, the pet may need cortisone or an anti-inflammatory medicine to reduce the pain and inflammation.

Just as it is important to clean the ears regularly to prevent an ear infection, it is also important to clean the ears daily before applying the ear medicine. Otherwise, the wax will build up again and the medicine will not reach the skin surface of the canal to cure the problem. There are many medications that veterinarians use to cure ear infections. I prefer drops instead of ointments, since the drops will trickle all the way down the ear canal and not leave as much residue as an ointment that will need to be cleaned out. However, there are some medications that only come in ointment form and are occasionally needed to resolve the problem. The best medicine, of course, is a preventative approach to ear care. That is why we highly recommend that you get in the habit of cleaning your pet's ears regularly with an antiseptic ear cleaner approved by your veterinarian. That way you and your pet will never have to deal with the pain-and expense-of an ear infection.