

Chronic Ear Problems

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Overview

Chronic ear problems are often associated with inflammation of the ear and can be caused by a number of different underlying diseases such as infections (bacterial or fungal), allergies, ear mites, endocrine diseases such as hypothyroidism or tumors. The most common ear disorder is otitis externa, an inflammation of the outer ear. Dogs can also get middle and inner ear problems. In fact, most cases (over 80 percent) of chronic or relapsing otitis externa also have middle ear inflammation (otitis media). This results from chronic inflammation of the external part of the ear canal, rupture of the tympanic membrane (ear drum) and establishment of infection in the middle part of the ear.

Chronic ear inflammation stimulates the proliferation of the skin lining the ear canal. As a consequence, thickening of the canal occurs and leads to narrowing of the canal. More importantly the skin is thrown into numerous folds, and this inhibits effective cleaning and the application of medications. These folds act as a site for the perpetuation and protection of secondary micro-organisms like bacteria. Long term treatment is necessary to help alleviate the symptoms of chronic ear problems.

Diagnosis and Treatment Notes:

- Chronic ear problems are generally diagnosed by a thorough history, physical examination and complete ear exam including cytology. Culture and sensitivity of the ear discharge is often performed to determine the type of bacteria present and to help select the most appropriate antibiotic.
- Treatment depends on the severity of the disease, your individual pet, and your veterinarian. Pets with chronic ear problems are treated with antibiotics, both topically and orally, anti-fungal drugs, anti-inflammatory drugs and ear cleanings. In some cases, surgery may be necessary. Discuss treatment details when your pet is diagnosed with this condition.

What to Watch for*:

- Head shaking or scratching at ears
- Foul odor from ears
- Ear discharge
- Head tilt

**Please notify us if you notice any of the above signs or if you have any questions!*