



Outer Ear Infection (Otitis Externa)

Your Questions Answered

Patient Information Leaflet

What is it?

It is an infection of the ear canal. It is a common condition, which affects all ages.

What causes it?

It is caused by an increased moisture and warmth in the ear canal. It can affect people who swim a lot, people who live in hot climates and by inserting objects such as cotton buds etc. into the ear canal. This results in breaking the skin of the ear canal thus allowing bacteria to enter the body.

It can also affect people who suffer from the skin disorder eczema and it can also be more prevalent in the summer months.

What does it feel and look like?

Itching of the Ear –because of the itching people tend to relieve the pain by inserting objects into the ear but can cause the condition to worsen by creating tiny breaks in the skin.

Pain– especially outside the ear when the ear is touched or pulled.

Discharge (oozing from the ear canal) – which can be yellow creamy or tan colour.

Loss of Hearing – this can occur due to swelling and shedding of the skin cells in the ear canal but it is easily reversed with successful treatment.

How is it treated?

The Doctor/Nurse will take a swab from your ear and then clean out your ear.

The Infection may be treated with antibiotics or steroid drops/cream/ointment or a dressing with antibiotic may be placed in your ear and is left in place for a few days.

You may also be given a prescription for painkillers if you need them.

How can it be prevented?

- Keep your ear canals dry when swimming, washing your hair or showering by using cotton wool at the entrance of your ear canal, then smear with Vaseline to make a seal.
- Do not use cotton buds or hair grips etc. to clean your ears. This can damage the skin and may cause a hole in your eardrum.

- Do not scratch your ears as this can spread infection.
- If your symptoms get worse see your Doctor or Nurse.

How put in Your Ear Drops

1. Lie down on your side with your affected ear facing up.
2. Drop the drops into the ear one at a time at the opening of your ear.
3. Gently move your outer ear to allow the drops fall more deeply into your ear.
4. Stay lying down for 3 –4 minutes giving the drops a chance to reach the deepest part of the ear canal.
5. Some of the drops will spill out of the ear. Gently wipe with a clean tissue.

We hope that this information is helpful to you. If anything is unclear, or you have any other questions you would like to ask, then please do ask the nurse/doctor.

Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital Emergency Department

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Revision History

Ref No.	Version No.	Date Approved	Change	Section No.	Approved by
	1	2001	New Information Leaflet	-	
PIL 018	2	April 2014	Revised Information Leaflet	all	Hospital Management Group