



Swimmers Ear:

Swimmer's ear is a common illness during the summer months but can also occur at any time throughout the year. It is an inflammation, irritation or infection of the ear canal brought on typically by too much moisture within the ear canal. Those who spend lots of time in the water are at more risk for swimmer's ear as bacteria like to grow in warm moist environments. Although more rare, swimmer's ear can also be caused by a fungus. When water enters the ear canal it makes a wonderful place for those bacteria to grow. Those who use q-tips to clean their ears or wear ear plugs/ear buds are also at risk as it changes the bacteria within the inner ear also creating a nice environment for bad bacteria to take over and cause the inflammation and swelling.

Signs/symptoms of Swimmer's ear:

- Drainage from the ear which can be yellow, yellow-green, pus-like or foul smelling
- Hearing loss
- Pain in the ear which may become worse when you pull on the outer ear and pain while chewing
- Ear feels full and congested
- Itching of the ear or ear canal

Exams and tests

Diagnosis is made by looking in the ear canal which will appear red and swollen. Drainage can also be present. Moving the outer ear likely will increase the pain. A sample of fluid may be taken from the ear and sent to the lab for a culture and this will determine if there is a bacteria or fungus present.

Treatment

Most commonly antibiotic with steroid ear drops are prescribed for 10-14 days. If there is significant swelling within the canal a wick may be put in the ear to assist the drops in getting deeper in the ear.

Other treatments can include oral antibiotics, steroids to reduce swelling and inflammation, pain medication (typically over the counter Tylenol or ibuprofen) and acetic acid ear drops.

Warm moist packs applied to the ear can help to decrease discomfort as well.

Contact your healthcare provider if:

- Any symptoms listed above are present
- Any drainage is noted coming from your ears

Symptoms worsen despite treatment

You develop additional symptoms such as fever, pain or redness behind the ear

How do you prevent swimmer's ear?

Swimming in clean water decreases your chances of swimmer's ear.

Try to drain your ears after swimming by tilting your head to each side.

Avoid water getting into your ears when showering, shampooing or bathing.

Try using a drying ear drop to fully dry the ear out after swimming. These are available at your local pharmacy.

Avoid using q-tips to clean your ears. If they need to be cleaned, talk to your healthcare provider.

Use earplugs only if instructed to by your healthcare provider or if you or your child has tubes in their ears. If using earplugs make sure they fit properly.