

OTITIS EXTERNA (Swimmer's Ear)

TO YOUR HEALTH - PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

7.9

DESCRIPTION

Otitis externa is inflammation of the skin of the external canal which leads from the outside of the ear inward to the eardrum.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Itching in the ear
- Swelling of ear canal
- Pain in the ear
- Discharge of pus or drainage from the ear
- Possible diminished hearing
- Slight fever (sometimes)
- Small painful lump in ear canal

CAUSES

- Bacterial (most common) or fungal infection of the delicate skin lining of the ear canal.
- Injury to the ear canal.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Activities that cause water to get in the ear canal.
- Using cotton swabs in ear canal.
- Inserting foreign objects in ear canal.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

Curable with treatment.

PREVENTION

Dry ears well, but don't use cotton swabs or other objects in ear canal. Alcohol/acetic acid ear drops after swimming may be useful to help dry the ear canals. Wear ear plugs when swimming.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Systemic infection, rare, yet serious complication.
Chronic otitis externa, the infection persists or recurs often

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider can diagnose an outer ear infection by an exam of the ear. Other medical tests are normally not needed.
- Treatment may involve your health care provider cleaning and draining the ear, drug therapy, and other steps to relieve pain.
- Apply heat to the area around the ear to relieve pain. Use a warm washcloth.
- Avoid swimming until the infection clears up.
- Gentle cleaning of the ear canal; remember that a small amount of ear-wax helps protect against infection.
- Keep the infected ear dry. Wear ear-plugs or shower cap for showering.

MEDICATION

- Prescription medicated ear drops are the most frequent treatment. Follow the directions carefully. In severe cases, an oral antibiotic may be used.
- Nonprescription pain relievers may be used.

ACTIVITY

Resume your normal activities as soon as symptoms improve. Avoid getting water in the ears if possible. If you do, dry ears carefully.

NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF...

- Severe pain not relieved with treatment.
- Fever over 101°.

Student Health Center



WWW.SIU.EDU/~SHC

This information is for educational purposes only. Consult your doctor for specific medical advice, diagnosis and treatment.

618-453-3311

Dial-A-Nurse is available after-hours until 10:30 p.m. during fall and spring semesters. In case of emergency dial 911.