

Ear - Swimmer's

Definition

- An infection or irritation of the skin that lines the ear canal
- Caused by lots of swimming or using cotton swabs
- The medical name is otitis externa

Health Information

Symptoms

- Starts with an itchy ear canal
- Ear canal can become painful
- Pain gets worse when the ear is moved up and down
- The ear feels plugged or full
- Ear discharge may start as the swimmer's ear gets worse
- No cold symptoms or fever

Causes

- When water gets trapped in the ear canal, the lining becomes wet and swollen.
- This makes it prone to an infection with germs (swimmer's ear).
- Wax buildup also traps water behind it. Most often, this is caused by cotton swabs.
- Ear canals were meant to be dry.

Prevention of Recurrent Swimmer's Ear

- Try to keep the ear canals dry.
- After showers, hair washing, or swimming, help the water run out of ears. Do this by turning and shaking the head.
- Do not use cotton swabs. Reason: Packs in the earwax. The wax buildup then traps water behind it.
- If swimmer's ear is a frequent problem, rinse the ear canals after swimming. Use a few drops of a white vinegar-rubbing alcohol rinse. Use equal parts of each to make the rinse.
- Lake water has the greatest risk. After any lake swimming, rinse the ear canals with tap water. Do this until you can get some vinegar ear drops.

Care Advice

1. Overview:

- Swimmer's ear is a mild infection of the ear canal.
- It's caused by water getting trapped in the ear canal. Ear canals were meant to be dry.
- Here is some care advice that should help.

2. **White Vinegar Rinses:**
 - Rinse the ear canals with half-strength white vinegar. Mix vinegar with equal parts warm water. (Exception: ear tubes or hole in eardrum.)
 - Start by having your child lie down with the painful ear upward.
 - Fill the ear canal.
 - Wait 5 minutes. Then, turn your child's head to the side and move the ear. This will remove the vinegar rinse.
 - Do the other side.
 - Continue twice a day until the ear canal returns to normal.
 - Reason: Restores the normal acid pH of the ear canal and lessens swelling.
3. **Antibiotic-Steroid Ear Drops:**
 - Severe swimmer's ear needs prescription ear drops to clear it up.
 - Stop the vinegar ear rinses.
 - Give the special ear drops as directed.
 - Try not to forget any of the doses.
4. **Pain Medicine:**
 - To help with the pain, give acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) or ibuprofen. Use as needed.
5. **Heat Pack:**
 - If pain is moderate to severe, use a heating pad (set on low). You can also use a warm wet cloth to outer ear.
 - Do this for 20 minutes. (Caution: Avoid burns). Repeat as needed.
 - This will also increase drainage.
6. **Reduce Swimming Times:**
 - Try not to swim until symptoms are gone.
 - If on a swim team, it's usually okay to continue.
 - Swimming may slow your child's recovery, but causes no serious harm.
7. **Return to School:**
 - Swimmer's ear cannot be spread to others.
 - No need to miss any school or child care.
8. **What to Expect:**
 - With treatment, symptoms should be better in 3 days.
 - They should be gone in 7 days.

Call Your Doctor If

- Ear pain becomes severe
- Ear symptoms last over 7 days on treatment
- You think your child needs to be seen
- Your child becomes worse

Pediatric Care Advice

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