

Dry Ear Precautions

Outer ear infections (Otitis Externa or “Swimmer’s Ear”) are infections of the skin lining the ear canal. Outer ear infections are often caused by excessive moisture that gets trapped in the ear canal. Excess moisture causes the skin to swell and crack, which allows bacteria to enter and cause an infection. Symptoms can include pain, an itchy ear, drainage from the ear, and/or muffled hearing.

Middle ear infections (Otitis Media) are ear infections that occur in the space behind the eardrum. Symptoms typically involve pain, fever, and muffled hearing as the pus gets trapped by the eardrum and a clogged eustachian tube (the drainage tube of the ear). Occasionally, so much pressure will build up that the eardrum ruptures, this often results in some relief of your ear pain and possibly blood and pus draining from your ear. **With a perforation or tube**, there is a pathway for the infected material to drain out into the ear canal, and pus can often be seen draining from the ear.

Outer ear infections and middle ear infections with tubes are treated in essentially the same manner. The infected material in the ear canal is typically suctioned out at the time of the office visit and antibiotic ear drops are prescribed.

To use the ear drops, tilt your head to the side and place the prescribed number of drops in the affected ear canal(s). Try to keep the head tilted for a few minutes. Try to avoid placing cotton in the ears after using the drops to ensure that the medicine you placed in your ear does not get absorbed by the cotton. The drops may occasionally sting, if this occurs, simply discontinue the drops and call for instructions during normal business hours.

Water should not be allowed to enter the ear. Swimming and/or other water activities are not permitted until cleared by your doctor. Additionally, care must be taken when bathing or washing the hair. ***A cotton ball covered in Vaseline should be placed over the opening of the ear canal to create a water tight seal.*** The cotton should also not be placed deep into the ear canal in order to avoid further irritation to the inflamed skin. A dry cotton ball is not sufficient. ***Also, do not re-use ear plugs or any device placed into the ear canal*** (ear phones, ear plugs, hearing aids) as the infected material can coat the device and end up being placed back into the ear canal. The ear canal should be open to the air as much as possible to allow the moisture to escape. If a device must be used, limit the use as much as possible and make sure to wipe down the ear piece with rubbing alcohol between each use.