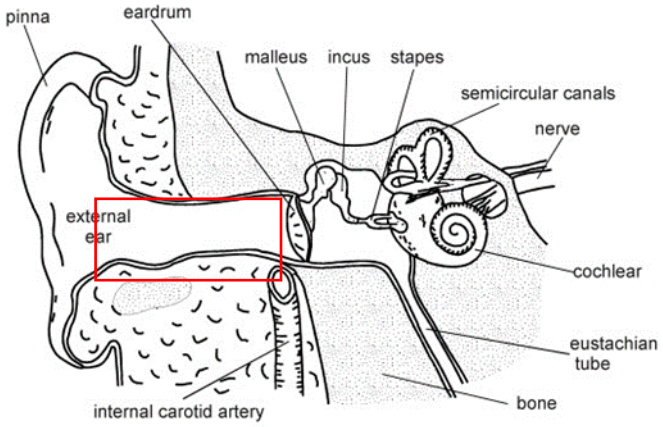
Otitis externa: causes and treatment

This leaflet is for patients with otitis externa (infection of the ear canal). If you do not understand anything or have any other concerns, please speak to a member of staff.

What is otitis externa?

It is inflammation and infection of the ear canal (the area in red on the diagram), usually caused by skin allergies, eczema or scratches and abrasions. Treatment with ear drops is usually effective.



CROSS SECTION OF THE EAR

What are the symptoms?

- Symptoms include itching, pain, discharge, temporary dulled hearing.

What is the treatment for otitis externa?

- Ear drops or sprays clear most cases of otitis externa, more successfully (in most cases) compared to oral treatment. They usually contain an antibiotic to clear the infection, and a steroid to reduce the inflammation and itching. It may take a week or so for symptoms to go completely. When you use ear drops, we advise you:
- To put drops in the ear as prescribed or advised by your doctor and lie in the required position for 1-2 minutes.
- Press the cartilage at the front of the ear canal a few times to push the drops deep inside the ear canal.
- Written instruction on how to insert ear drops are available in the ENT Outpatients Clinic or a nurse can advise you on this.
- Several brands of drops are available. If one does not work well then your doctor will advise you to change to another.
- Antibiotic tablets or medicines may be needed in addition to drops if the infection is severe.

Further treatment may be needed if the above measures do not work

- A doctor or nurse may clean the ear canal. Sometimes, gentle suction or mopping is used. This removes the discharge lying in the ear canal.
- Sometimes, a doctor or nurse will place a sponge dressing that is soaked in ear drops in the ear canal. This gets the drops right to the end of the ear canal, particularly if it is very swollen.

- A doctor may also take a swab of the discharge to find out which organisms are causing the infection and which antibiotic to use.

It is important that you follow the following advice:

- You may be sent home with an ear dressing still in place, which should be left there until your next appointment:
- You are advised to prevent water from entering the ear canal during your treatment. You can do this when showering by placing a piece of cotton wool coated in Vaseline in the outer ear.
- You are advised to continue using ear drops as directed by your doctor it is important you wash your hands before and after instilling drops.
- It is important to complete antibiotic treatment as directed by your doctor.
- It is important that you avoid cleaning the ear canal with cotton buds as they can further damage the skin and make things worse. Just clean the outside of the ear with a cloth when any discharge appears.

Ear pack

- If you are sent home with an ear dressing still in place, do not to remove it yourself the pack should stay in the ear until your next appointment. If some becomes dislodged, push back in with a clean finger.
- You may place a small piece of cotton wool inside your ear canal on top of the ear pack which can be changed when soiled, but take care not to disturb the internal packing.
- Painkillers like Paracetamol or Ibuprofen may help if pain develops.

Things to look out for:

- An increased, smelly discharge from your ear;
- Your outer ear becomes very red, inflamed and tender or painful;
- You develop a temperature- feel unwell and feverish;
- Redness that is spreading from your ear towards your face or neck region;
- If you experience any of the above, you need to seek advice from the ENT Department (during office hours) or the ward (out of hours). The numbers are in the back of this booklet.

Follow up

- You may be given an appointment to attend Outpatients Clinic; this will be sent to you in the post. It is important that you keep this appointment. If you cannot attend, please telephone the clinical admin team (CAT 1) to arrange another one.

How can I prevent further bouts of otitis externa?

- If you are prone to otitis externa, to help prevent recurrences, we advise that you keep the ears dry and leave them alone! This means:
- Try not to let soap or shampoo get into your ear canal. Use a piece of cotton wool coated in Vaseline in the outer ear while showering.
- Earplugs may be helpful to keep ears dry while swimming.

- Please do not use corners of towels or cotton buds to dry any water that does get in the ear canal. Let it dry naturally.
- Try not to scratch or poke the ear canal with fingers, cotton wool buds, towels, etc.
- Please do not clean the ear canal with cotton buds. They may scratch and irritate, and push wax or dirt further into the ear. The ear cleans itself, and bits of wax will fall out now and again.
- Do not leave balls of cotton wool in the ear canal. This stops the discharge (debris) which needs to come out. However, if the discharge is continuous, then some cotton wool placed loosely in the outer part of the canal may be needed to mop up the discharge. If you use cotton wool, replace it when it becomes soiled.

We wish you a speedy recovery and hope this leaflet has been useful.

Contacting us

Greenlands Ward: 0118 322 7172 or 0118 322 8101
ENT Outpatient Department (Townlands) reception: 01865 903274
Clinical Admin Team (CAT 1) Townlands: 01865 903261
Clinical Admin Team (CAT 1) Royal Berkshire Hospital: 0118 322 7139

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

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