

DRY EAR PRECAUTIONS FOR OUTER EAR INFECTIONS AND MIDDLE EAR INFECTIONS WITH EAR TUBES

Outer ear infections (Otitis Externa or “Swimmer’s Ear”) are infections of the skin lining the ear canal that goes down and stops at the level of the eardrum. Outer ear infections are almost always caused by excessive moisture that gets trapped in the ear canal. If the moisture is not removed in a timely manner, the skin becomes cracked and irritated leading to pain, drainage from the ear, and muffled hearing.

Middle ear infections (Otitis Media) involve the space behind the eardrum. Symptoms typically involve pain, fever, and muffled hearing as the inflammation is trapped by the eardrum. Drainage or swelling of the ear does not occur unless there is a hole in the eardrum, either from a rupture (perforation) or ear tube. **With a perforation or tube**, there is a pathway for the infected material to drain out into the ear canal. This results in a situation very similar to that of an outer ear infection.

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 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, then place a cotton ball at the opening of the ear canal to catch any extra fluid and repeat on the other side. 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 reuse 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 and the ear to air dry. 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