

Swimmer's ear is inflammation, irritation, or infection of the outer ear and ear canal. The medical term for swimmer's ear is otitis externa. Swimmer's ear is different from the kind of infection you get in the middle part of your ear, your eardrum. That kind of infection is called otitis media.

## Causes

- The infection commonly occurs in those who spend a lot of time in the water. Too much moisture in the ear can irritate and break down the skin in the canal, allowing bacteria to penetrate. Water also removes protective earwax. In temperate climates, otitis externa occurs more often in summertime, when swimming is common.
- You don't have to swim to get swimmer's ear. Anything that causes a break in the skin of the ear canal can lead to an infection. Trying to clean wax from the ear canal, especially with cotton swabs or small objects, can irritate or damage the skin.
- If you have had swimmer's ear in the past, you are more likely to get it again.

## Symptoms

- **Itching** of the ear canal is often the first symptom
- **Ear Pain** – touching or moving the outer ear increases the pain, as well as chewing or laying down on the affected ear.
- **Swelling of the ear canal** – the eardrum may be difficult for the doctor to see because of swelling/debris in the ear canal.
- **Drainage** – yellow, yellow-green, pus-like, or foul smelling.

## Treatment

- To cure the infection, usually eardrops containing antibiotics will be prescribed.
- Generally, antibiotics that are taken by mouth are not needed.
- The ear canal should be cleaned of drainage. This allows the medicine to work better.
- Four or five drops should be used at a time, so that the medicine can get to the end of the ear canal.

## Prevention

- Keep the ears clean and dry.
- Do not insert cotton swabs or other objects in the ears.
- Consider mixing 1 drop of alcohol with 1 drop of white vinegar and placing the mixture into the ears after they get wet. You can also buy a solution over the counter at the drugstore.