



Swimmer's ear

Swimmer's ear is the common name for *acute otitis externa*: an infection in the ear canal.

People who regularly get water in their ears are more likely experience otitis externa, which is why it is often referred to as *swimmer's ear*.

Causes

The most common cause of swimmer's ear are bacterial or fungal infections. This bacteria is normally present in the ear canal without causing any problems. However, increased moisture in the ear can result in bacteria multiplication, and that's when the infection starts.



Increased moisture in the ear can occur if the ears are regularly submerged in water when swimming, bathing or from spending time in humid environments. Wax or foreign bodies can also increase the risk of swimmer's ear by trapping water deep in the ear canal.

Other factors such as swimming in dirty water (e.g. spas), excessive use of cotton buds to clean the ears, contact with chemicals (e.g. hair dyes or hair sprays), cuts or abrasions in the ear canal and other skin conditions (e.g. eczema) can lead to swimmer's ear.

Signs

Common symptoms of swimmer's ear are itching, pain, a blocked sensation in the ear, hearing loss, pus or discharge from the ear, fever or pain around the ear or in the neck.

Treatment

Swimmer's ear is treated by carefully cleaning the ear canal and applying drops. Drops will be prescribed by your GP or ENT specialist. It may be necessary for the ear to be cleaned more than once by the doctor until it has healed.



Prevention

The most effective way of preventing swimmer's ear is to use swim plugs whenever your ears are exposed to water. The audiologists at Lions Hearing Clinic will be able to discuss your options for swimming plugs.

The use of cotton buds can also increase the risk of swimmer's ear. The ears are self-cleaning and most of us do not need to remove wax from our ears at all, until the wax migrates to a point where you can easily wipe it away with a flannel or a tissue. If you do suffer from wax build up it is best to have the wax removed regularly by a doctor or nurse.