

Ear Infection – Otitis Externa - Canker
ALTERNATIVE VETERINARY MEDICINE CENTRE
Information Sheet WS088/08
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EAR INFECTION – OTITIS EXTERNA – CANKER
in Dogs

What is it?

Chronic ear infections are a form of skin disease, usually confined to the ear. '*Otitis externa*', '*chronic otitis*' and '*canker*' are synonyms. It can be very itchy. The dog will usually shake his head and scratch his ear. Sometimes, that side of the head is held lower (head tilt).

Such infections can be troublesome to clear, not least because ventilation and drainage of the ear canal are difficult. In many cases, they represent a management challenge, while the slow process of healing takes place.

Is it curable?

One can expect a good result (although not necessarily a 'cure') in most cases. In extreme cases, surgery may be suggested, but even this can fail.

There are a variety of options, besides the conventional antibiotic and steroid combinations. Some of these can be used alongside the conventional treatment, if necessary but the experience of the AVMC is with those cases that have not responded to conventional therapy.

Antibiotics only fight bacteria, so cannot cure the problem alone. Steroids (a.k.a. corticosteroids or cortisone) are anti-inflammatory. They are in many ear drops or come as injections or tablets. They can provide often rapid relief but at the price of suppression, whereby the disease can be driven 'deeper'. Using such measures may result in temporary relief but delays hopes of cure. For this reason, we usually avoid using them if possible. We only resort to them if necessary from a short-term welfare point of view.

Homeopathic options

Homeopathic constitutional prescribing can help underlying immune and skin health problems. An experienced [homeopathic vet](#) can help you. Common [homeopathic](#) medicines which can be used in this way are *Graphites*, *Sulphur* and *Psorinum*. If the ear is hot, red and very painful, *Belladonna* can usually reduce pain and infection, in the short term. A great many other remedies may be of value, depending on the individual patient, hence the need for expert veterinary help.

Herbal options

[Herbal](#) *Echinacea*, *Garlic*, *Cleavers*, *Blue Flag*, *Golden Rod* and *Golden Seal* may be of value, depending upon the individual patient. Apart from giving oral treatments, which must be prescribed by a suitably experienced vet (**some are potentially toxic**), herbal remedies can be used locally (i.e. directly into the ear canal). *Pennywort* juice, *Mullein*, *Almond*, *Olive* and *Clove* oils, *Chamomile*, *Hyssop*, *Aloe* and *Yarrow* have all proved useful, in different cases. There are many products in stores and on the web, vying for your spending. Most have no licence and many companies have no proper tradition of service. If you are undertaking some of the care yourself, where welfare allows, **only use licensed products** and seek appropriate veterinary advice.

Aromatherapy options

[Aromatherapy](#) uses aromatic and volatile oils from plants (essential oils). They are powerful and **potentially toxic**, so must be prescribed by a suitably experienced vet. **Never use in a pregnant bitch.** *Rosemary*, *Lavender*, *Geranium*, *Chamomile*, *Jasmine*, *Hyssop*, *Juniper*, *Myrrh* and *Neroli*, can all prove helpful, depending upon the case. If they irritate unduly, on application, dilute with organic, cold-pressed olive oil and slightly warm before applying.

Tissue Salts

Schuessler [Tissue Salts](#) are appropriate for home first-aid use too. *Kali sulph.*, *Kali mur.*, *Natrum phos.* and *Ferrum phos.* can be given in combination, as a useful healing and balancing stimulus.

Other remedies

An old recipe, used by my mother (a retired vet), was *Boric Zinc and Starch* powder. It is healing, antiseptic and absorbent. *Iodoform* powder was also used, if the patient was not iodine-sensitive (it is a much 'stronger' antibacterial and antifungal agent). There are modern imitations of these old remedies, but few

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modern vets are conversant with them. *Fullers Earth* is a hygienic and soothing clay, which acts as an adsorbent. All dry preparations incur the risk of making 'cement' in the ear, however, if there is moist discharge. **Be very careful** to avoid this and use such agents very sparingly.

Live organic *Yoghurt* is useful to counteract yeast and fungal infections. *Honey* combines with natural body secretions to form mild acids, serving to deter bacteria and remove debris. These remedies can be attractive to flies and wasps, however, so do not use in summer.

Diet

A varied, natural, unprocessed [diet](#), preferably organic, will accelerate and improve healing. There should be no need for supplements in such a diet but consider *Zinc*, *Vitamin C* and *Essential Fatty Acids* to aid skin health and immune capability.

Note 1: Look out for haematoma formation, in the ear flap, arising from trauma to blood vessels in the ear flap from shaking and scratching. If this happens, it may require draining by a vet, to prevent ear flap distortion, but there is a right time to do it. Too early and it will fill again. Too late and the ear flap will already have started to shrink and distort. Surgery may be offered but is not always necessary.

Note 2: It is illegal for non-vets to prescribe homeopathy, herbs, aromatherapy or tissue salts for your dog ([Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966](#)). This law is being 'bent' by those who market medicines, whether on the web or by mail – caveat emptor.

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