

## DESCRIPTION

Inflammation (redness and soreness), infection or irritation of the ear canal that extends from the eardrum to the outside.

## FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Ear pain that worsens when the earlobe is pulled.
- Itching in the ear.
- Slight fever (sometimes).
- Discharge of pus from the ear.
- Temporary loss of hearing on the affected side.
- A small, painful lump or boil in the ear canal.

## CAUSES

- Bacterial (most common) or fungal infection.
- Injury to the ear canal.

## RISK INCREASES WITH

- Swimming in dirty/polluted water.
- Excess moisture in the ear from any cause.
- Irritation from cotton swabs or metal objects.
- Previous ear infections.
- Disorders like diabetes that affect the immune system.
- Use of hair spray or hair dye that may enter the ear canal.

## PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Dry ears completely after they have become wet.
- Wear earplugs when swimming.
- Don't clean your ears with any object.
- Ask your doctor about keeping prescribed drops on hand.

## EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Usually curable with treatment in 7 to 10 days. Possible complications include:

- Chronic otitis externa.
- Spread of infection to bones or cartilage (rare).

## GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider can diagnose an outer ear infection by an exam of the ear.
- Treatment may involve your health care provider cleaning and draining the ear, drugs, and other steps to relieve pain.
- Apply heat to the area around the ear to relieve pain. Use a warm washcloth.
- Gentle cleaning of the ear canal; remember that a small amount of earwax helps protect against infection.
- Keep the infected ear dry, wear earplugs or shower cap for showering. Swimming should be avoided until infection clears up.

## MEDICATIONS

Your health care provider may prescribe

- Eardrops for bacterial infections.
- Cortisone to help with other symptoms.
- Oral steroids may also be prescribed to reduce inflammation.
- Steroid drops to reduce inflammation.
- Oral antibiotics may be prescribed for severe infection.

You should begin your steroid prescription today.

You should begin your steroid prescription tomorrow.

↳ Unless your doctor tells you differently, always finish the full course of your antibiotic and/or steroid prescription, even if you start to feel better.

↳ Antibiotics and steroids may interfere with the effectiveness of birth control pills. Use an alternative method of contraception for the remainder of the month after finishing your antibiotic and/or steroid prescription.

↳ An ear wick may be used that allows the drug to reach the end of the ear canal.

Your doctor also recommends the following over-the-counter medications. These medications may offer significant symptom relief:

For fever or pain use acetaminophen or ibuprofen.

(Acetaminophen and ibuprofen may also be alternated every 3 hours for persistent fever or pain.)

Antihistamine

Decongestant (Such as Phenylephrine or Pseudoephedrine)

Mucolytic (Such as Guaifenesin)

## SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IF:

- Pain persists, despite treatment