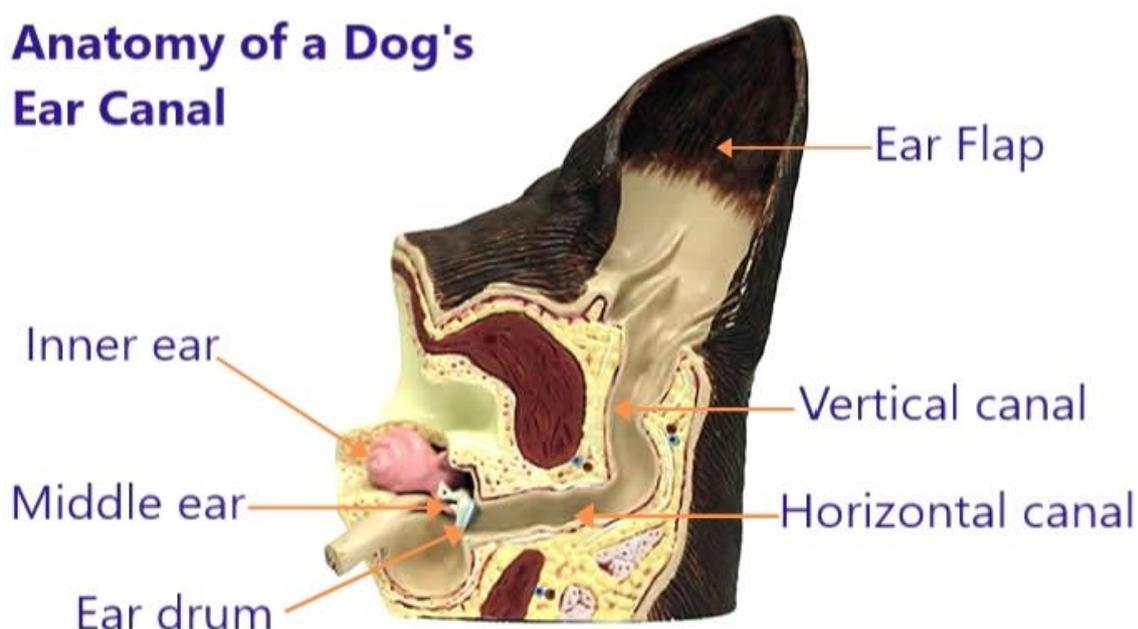


## Ear Disease in Dogs, Cats and Rabbits

The ear canal in dogs, cats and rabbits is lined with skin. The canal keeps the skin warm and moist, and provides a good environment for overgrowth of bacteria and yeast. Wax is produced to trap these organisms along with dust, dirt and foreign material, to prevent ear infection and damage to the ear drum. Sometimes the wax builds up and can no longer be shaken out of the ear, leading to ear infections known as otitis. These can be restricted to the outer ear (otitis externa), or break through the ear drum into the middle ear (otitis media). Severe infections can also reach the inner ear and affect balance (otitis interna – similar to labyrinthitis in people).

### **Anatomy of a Dog's Ear Canal**



#### **Causes:**

Ear mites are a common cause of otitis externa, especially in young animals and rabbits. Other causes include skin allergies, foreign bodies (such as grass seeds) and polyps (which are common in cats). Swimming in dirty water also increases the risk of ear infection. Breeds with long, floppy ear flaps have reduced air flow around the ear canal, so ear disease is more common e.g. basset hounds and spaniels. Some breeds have thickened, narrow ear canals which reduce wax flow and increase the risk of wax build up and otitis, such as the shar-pei.

#### **Clinical signs:**

Symptoms of ear disease include head shaking, scratching/rubbing of one or both ears, ear discharge, foul smell from ears, reddening ear flaps or pain when the area is touched. If the inner ear is affected there may also be a head tilt and problems with balance.

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## Diagnosis:

Diagnosis is made by physical examination by your vet. If the ear is very painful a thorough examination may require sedation or anaesthetic e.g. to remove a grass seed lodged in the ear canal. Swabs may be taken and looked at under the microscope to check for parasites, yeast and bacteria, or they may be sent off to a lab for culture to see exactly what is growing in the ear. X-rays may be taken to check for middle or inner ear disease.

## Treatment:

Treatment options will depend on the cause and severity of otitis, but will commonly include ear cleaning and application of treatment directly into the ear canal, and possibly oral medications. Some cleaning products and treatments are not suitable if the ear drum is damaged, so it's important your pet is checked by the vet to ensure this is intact before starting treatment. Make sure you follow the treatment protocol recommended by your veterinary professionals and ensure all follow up appointments are attended.

## How to clean your ears in dogs and cats:

Regular ear cleaning can help to reduce wax build up and the risk of infection. Effective ear cleaning can be tricky, especially if your pet's ears are sore. The anatomy of the ear of dogs and cats includes a vertical canal, then a 90 degree bend into a horizontal canal.

Good ear cleaners will have a long, soft nozzle which will reach down the vertical canal. You should use a [pH balanced ear cleaner](#), which does not interfere with additional antibiotic and anti-inflammatory treatments. Insert the nozzle into the ear canal and give a good squirt of the ear cleaner. Massage the base of the ear – you should hear a squelching noise. Allow your pet to shake their head (stand back!) to get rid of the cleaner and wax. Wipe the excess from around the outside of the ear with cotton wool. Don't put anything down your pet's ear canal to wipe it – you could damage the delicate lining of the ear, or the ear drum itself. Take a look at [this 'how to' video](#).



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