

Swimmer's Ear: Treatment and Prevention of One of Summer's Most Common Problems

By Dr. Karen Prentice

What is it? Swimmer's ear or otitis externa is an infection of the outer ear canal, which is the area between the eardrum and the outside of your ear.

How do we get it? Swimmer's ear infection occurs when water gets trapped in the outer ear canal giving bacteria a nice moist area to grow. Scratching the outer ear canal by using cotton swabs or other objects in the ear can also cause swimmer's ear by causing abrasions to the skin of the outer canal that eventually become infected with bacteria.

What are the symptoms? Common symptoms include itching and pain in the outer ear canal, extreme tenderness of the outer ear to touch and sometimes drainage.

How do we treat it? After your doctor has examined your child and diagnosed a swimmer's ear infection, they will determine whether antibiotic ear drops are appropriate. Most often antibiotic drops instilled directly into the affected ear are all that is necessary to treat a swimmer's ear. Keeping the ear dry until the infection has cleared is also very important, meaning no swimming or going under in a bathtub. Infections typically clear in 7 to 10 days.

How can we prevent it? As long as your child's ear is free of infection and not perforated, you can use swimmer's ear drops after swimming. There are a variety of brands to choose in stores or for your convenience, you can purchase drops while you're in the office from Where the Garden Grows Medical Clinic. You can also make the drops at home by using 1 part rubbing alcohol and 1 part white vinegar. After swimming put 4-5 drops in each ear then let it run out. **Please remember that these drops are for the prevention of swimmer's ear and not for treatment.**

Please do not hesitate to ask us if you have any questions. Have a great summer!