

Swimmer's Ear in Children: Care Instructions



Your Care Instructions

Swimmer's ear (otitis externa) is inflammation or infection of the ear canal. This is the passage that leads from the outer ear to the eardrum. Any water, sand, or other debris that gets into the ear canal and stays there can cause swimmer's ear. Putting cotton swabs or other items in the ear to clean it can also cause this problem.

Swimmer's ear can be very painful. You can treat the pain and infection with medicines. Your child should feel better in a few days.

Follow-up care is a key part of your child's treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if your child is having problems. It's also a good idea to know your child's test results and keep a list of the medicines your child takes.

How can you care for your child at home?

Cleaning and care

- Use antibiotic drops as your doctor directs.
- Do not insert eardrops (other than the antibiotic eardrops) or anything else into your child's ear unless your doctor has told you to.
- Avoid getting water in your child's ear until the problem clears up. Use cotton lightly coated with petroleum jelly as an earplug. Do not use plastic earplugs.
- Use a hair dryer to carefully dry the ear after your child showers. Make sure the dryer is on the lowest heat setting.
- To ease ear pain, hold a warm washcloth against your child's ear.
- Be safe with medicines. Give pain medicines exactly as directed.
 - If the doctor gave your child a prescription medicine for pain, give it as prescribed.

- If your child is not taking a prescription pain medicine, ask your doctor if your child can take an over-the-counter medicine.
- Do not give your child two or more pain medicines at the same time unless the doctor told you to. Many pain medicines have acetaminophen, which is Tylenol. Too much acetaminophen (Tylenol) can be harmful.

Inserting eardrops

- Warm the drops to body temperature by rolling the container in your hands. Or you can place it in a cup of warm water for a few minutes.
- Have your child lie down, with his or her ear facing up. For a small child, you can try another technique. Hold the child on your lap with the child's legs around your waist and the child's head on your knees.
- Place drops inside the ear. Follow your doctor's instructions (or the directions on the prescription or label) for how many drops to put in the ear. Gently wiggle the outer ear or pull the ear up and back to help the drops get into the ear.
- It's important to keep the liquid in the ear canal for 3 to 5 minutes.

When should you call for help?



Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- Your child has new or worse symptoms of infection, such as:
 - Increased pain, swelling, warmth, or redness.
 - Red streaks leading from the area.
 - Pus draining from the area.
 - A fever.

Watch closely for changes in your child's health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- Your child does not get better as expected.

Where can you learn more?

Go to <https://www.healthwise.net/PatientEd>

Enter **O532** in the search box to learn more about "**Swimmer's Ear in Children: Care Instructions**".

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