

# How to Administer Ear Medications

## BACKGROUND

Ear medications are often administered to pets that have an ear infection, inflammation, or a condition within the ear canal that requires treatment. It is important to treat the ear canal correctly, ensuring the solution reaches the target location. With practice, instilling medications into the ear canal is easy and can be done at home as needed.

## GETTING STARTED

Equipment/materials needed:

- Gloves
- Topical ear medication

Your veterinarian should have prescribed a specific medication to administer into your pet's ear. You should wear latex (or similar) medical exam gloves to prevent you from coming in contact with potential bacteria or fungi that your pet may harbor, as well as with the medication.

## TROUBLESHOOTING BEFOREHAND

The ear that is affected should begin healing within the first few days of medication application. In serious conditions, healing may take longer. However, if you notice any of the following symptoms, you should contact your veterinarian immediately:

- Increased discharge
- Increased redness, swelling, or heat from the ear
- Increased pain
- Increased shaking or scratching of the head
- Spreading of the condition
- Inability to instill the medication (for example, if your pet will not allow it or because you feel you are not doing it correctly)

If your pet shows resentment to having this done, stop the procedure and call your veterinarian for further advice. The ear may be too painful to treat without additional medications, and it is imperative that you neither hurt your pet nor put yourself at risk of a nip or bite. Resistance to treatment may also be an indication that an infection is worsening and needs to be rechecked immediately.

## PROCEDURE

- In calm pets, medications can be administered into the ears by just one person, but with young, excited animals or pets that dislike (or are unfamiliar with) having the ears handled, it may be necessary to have one person distracting and/or holding the pet while another person instills the medication. Whatever motivates your pet can serve as a distraction – a bit of food, a ball (just the sight of the ball can distract many dogs!), etc. The whole process should take less than 5 minutes. If it is too complicated or difficult, notify your veterinarian to discuss whether there are alternative strategies.
- If your veterinarian provided you with a solution to clean the ears, this must be done before instilling medication. This allows ear debris to be loosened before the application of the medication, and if the medication were placed first, before the ear cleaning, the cleaning solution would eliminate the medication altogether.
- With one hand, gently flip the ear flap straight up. This is best done by cupping the ear flap (pinna) in your right hand, with the haired part of the ear against the palm of your hand and your thumb on the hairless inner surface of the ear flap. You should be able to see the inside of the ear (ear canal) this way. Some

breeds of dogs have naturally upright ears, and in these dogs, the hand can simply be cupped behind the ear.

- Holding the ear flap cupped in the palm of your hand means that the ear canal takes on the shape of a funnel. You can then drip the medication directly into the deepest part of the ear canal. Be sure not to put the tip of the nozzle (or medication tube) directly into the ear canal. Rather, place the tip of the tube or bottle at the opening of the ear canal, and aim the nozzle so the drops of medication fall into the greatest depth of the ear canal. Do not allow the nozzle tip to touch the ear canal, which would contaminate the bottle/tube and its contents. Massage the entire canal by using your thumb and forefinger to gently roll the tissues of the ear canal. It feels like a tube under the skin and may be painful in some dogs—do this gently, and stop if there are signs of pain like crying or pulling away, allowing the medication to work through the entire ear.
- All dogs will shake their head after this, which propels the wax and debris outward and away from the eardrum. You can wipe this off the inner surface of the ear flap with cotton gauze. This is why Q-tips and other cotton swabs should NEVER be inserted in the ear canal: they push debris further in, whereas ear cleaning loosens the debris so it can be expelled.
- If your pet scratches his or her ear excessively, an Elizabethan collar (E-collar) may be necessary while the medication is taking effect. These collars can be purchased from your veterinarian or a pet supply store. Scratching the ears can cause self-induced damage and therefore must be prevented.
- Remember that the medication is cooler than body temperature and may feel cold to your pet when you apply it in the ear, especially on raw or sensitive areas. Apply a small amount at



Correct way to place solution in the ear. For the dog's left ear as shown, your right hand holds the pinna (ear flap) upward, and your left hand places the nozzle of the bottle at the entrance to the ear canal (top photo). After the medication has been placed in the ear canal, use your right hand to gently massage the outer part of the ear canal (bottom photo). It is just forward of the ear opening (shown where the right thumb is, here).

first, allowing the pet to become comfortable and adapt to this type of treatment, or warm the cleaning solution or medication by holding the tube or bottle in your armpit for 15 minutes before administration. The comfort that the medication brings makes it worthwhile.

## AFTERWARDS

Once you have finished, discard any remaining used gauze and gloves. Replace the cap on the medication and place in a safe area, out of reach of children and pets.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### *How often do I need to clean the area and apply the medication?*

Your veterinarian will direct you regarding how often to clean your pet's ears and apply the medication, based on the seriousness of the ear problem and how good a response is seen from initial treatment. It can vary from twice a day (certain medications) to once a week (light cleaning), and from a short course to lifelong, depending on the tendency of the problem to recur.

### *Should I apply the medication only until the area of concern is healed?*

Cleaning and medication application should be performed for as long as the veterinarian recommends, because some lesions or infections may appear healed, when in actuality the healing is incomplete. Some types of conditions take much longer to heal than others. An important exception is if you feel the condition is worsening during/despite treatment, and if you have any question in this respect, you should contact your veterinarian.

### *Are there any restrictions for my pet during treatment for an ear problem?*

Your pet should not have a bath or play in water until the area of concern has healed. Your veterinarian should recheck your pet's condition and advise you when your pet can have a bath and go swimming.

### *Can my pet cause more damage if he/she continuously shakes or scratches at the head?*

Yes, your pet can cause more damage (such as the appearance of an ear hematoma) and may require surgery should the condition worsen. An Elizabethan collar may be applied to prevent scratching of the ears as a temporary solution while medications begin to take effect. Contact your veterinarian if your pet continues to shake his or her head despite treatment.

## OTHER RELATED INFORMATION SHEET

- [How to Assemble and Use an Elizabethan Collar](#)



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