



EAR INFECTIONS MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

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eardrums, looking for signs of inflammation and abnormalities inside the ears. After the physical examination, a swab of the ear discharge will be collected and any residue will be placed on a glass slide. Inspecting the slide (cytology) under a microscope can yield a lot of information, telling the veterinarian if bacteria, yeast, or inflammatory cells are present. Determining which cells are present will help decide which medi-

cations are used to treat the infections. Having a cytology done at the beginning of treatment will also allow your veterinarian to assess the efficacy of treatment by looking for decreasing bacteria or yeast counts.

Treatment of ear infections is typically done with topical ear medications. Flushing the ears with ear cleaners help by removing pus, ear wax, infection, and accumulation of old medication. In severe cases, oral antibiotics or antifungals may also be used. However, it is important to note that ear infections are not a primary problem; they are a secondary manifestation of a primary disease. If ear infections are a recurrent problem or are accompanied by other skin problems, it is necessary to determine the underlying

cause. Some primary diseases that can result in ear infections include: atopic dermatitis (environmental allergies), food allergies, endocrine (hormonal) diseases such as hypothyroidism, autoimmune diseases, parasites (ear mites, soft ear ticks, or demodex mites), tumors in the ear, or even middle ear disease. Treating the underlying cause of the ear disease will decrease the frequency of the ear infections. Chronic ear infections can result in irreversible changes in the ear and should be monitored frequently. It is always a good idea to recheck the ears after treatment. The ears may look better from the outside, but the long ear canals of dogs can hide infection deeper down.

It is also important to know that with the rising temperatures, you may begin to notice ear infections more frequently in the summer months. This can be due to multiple factors. Atopic dermatitis can be a seasonal issue, causing ear infections in the spring and summer months. Warm summer days can also mean the beginning of swimming season. Dogs that swim, and especially dive under water, will get water in their ears. The increase in moisture in the ears can predispose dogs to developing ear infections. To help with this issue, most veterinary ear cleaners contain astringents (drying agents) and using a small amount after swimming can help dry the ears to prevent infection from occurring.

Did you know that ear infections are one of the top reasons that dogs visit their veterinarians? Most owners may start to notice symptoms such as scratching of the ears, head or neck and shaking of the head. Ear infections, also known as otitis externa, can also cause redness of the ear flaps or a smelly ear discharge. Unfortunately, in some cases, pain is noted at home when the ears are touched. If any of these symptoms are present, your pet may require medical attention by a veterinarian. It is important to remember that ear canals in dogs are much longer than in people, so just looking at the opening of the ear is not enough.

To determine if your pet may have an ear infection, a veterinarian will look in each ear to examine the canals and the