



Swimmer's Ear (Otitis Externa)

Patient and Family Education

What is swimmer's ear?

Swimmer's ear (otitis externa) is an infection of the skin of the ear canal. This can occur when:

- Water becomes trapped in the ear canal, which makes it become infected easier.
- Scratches in the ear canal from cotton swabs, paper clips, bobby pins and pencils become infected.

What are the possible symptoms?

Your child may have one or more of these symptoms:

- Ear pain, especially with touch or movement
- Itchy ears
- A feeling that the ear is stopped up
- Clear or milky ear drainage
- Swelling or redness of the ear

What is the treatment?

Your child's doctor will speak with you about specific care for your child. Some general guidelines to follow include:

- Give eardrops as directed. Sometimes a wick is used to keep the antibiotic against the ear canal. The wick should fall out in two to three days. If it does not, call your child's doctor.
 - You may warm the bottle under warm water for a few minutes. **Do not warm the bottle in the microwave.**
 - Use the eardrops until there are no symptoms for 48 hours.
- Give acetaminophen (Tylenol®, or other less costly store brand) if prescribed by your child's doctor for fever and pain. Follow the directions on the box carefully or ask your child's doctor how much medicine to give.
 - Do not give your child more than 5 doses of acetaminophen in a 24-hour period.
 - Do not give acetaminophen to babies less than 3 months of age without talking with your child's doctor.
- Apply warm compresses to the ear. They may help with pain.
- Do not allow water to get into the ear when bathing. Have your child use ear plugs if needed.
- Avoid swimming until all symptoms are gone or until allowed by the doctor.

When should I call the doctor?

Call your child's doctor if:

- Ear pain or ear drainage is not better in 24 hours with treatment
- He has a temperature over 100.3°F
- The area behind the ear becomes red

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room right away.

This is general information and is not specific medical advice for your child. Always consult your child's doctor or other healthcare provider if you have any questions or concerns about the care or health of your child. A Children's Healthcare of Atlanta pediatric advice nurse is available 24 hours a day at 404-250-KIDS.

Swimmer's Ear, continued

How can I prevent swimmer's ear?

- Dry your child's ear canal after swimming or bathing. Turn his head side to side while pulling the ear lobe in different directions to help drain out the water.
- Mix equal parts of distilled white vinegar and isopropyl alcohol. Put two to three drops in each ear after swimming. Other products are available—just ask your pharmacist.
- Never place anything inside the ear.
 - Do not use cotton swabs inside the ear.
 - Teach you child not to put things in his ear.

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