

Swimmer's Ear (Otitis Externa)

What is swimmer's ear?

Swimmer's ear, also known as otitis externa, is an inflammation, irritation, or infection of your outer ear canal caused by fungi or bacteria. Swimmer's ear can be caused by

- moisture trapped in the ear canal or
- an injury to the ear canal.

Some people with skin conditions, such as eczema or psoriasis, may get swimmer's ear more easily.

Swimmer's ear can be painful. It can happen to children or adults. If you are having ear pain, you should see your doctor or an ear, nose, and throat doctor—also called an ENT or otolaryngologist.

What are the signs of swimmer's ear?

You may notice these signs:

- redness and swelling of the outer ear and ear canal
- pain when you touch your ear
- drainage from the ear canal
- itchiness inside the ear
- full or plugged feeling in the ear

You may have some hearing loss if your ear is swollen or draining. This hearing loss usually goes away after the infection is gone.

How is swimmer's ear treated?

Swimmer's ear is usually treated with ear drops from your doctor. Your doctor may clean your ear canal or take a sample of any drainage to see which medicine will work the best. If your ear canal is very swollen, the doctor may have to leave a piece of cotton soaked in medicine in your ear to fight the infection. Your doctor may recommend a pain reliever if your ear canal hurts, as well as keeping the ear dry for a certain amount of time.

How can I avoid getting swimmer's ear?

The best way to avoid an infection is to keep your ear canal dry! Here are some tips to keep your ears dry and healthy:

- Dry your ears well with a towel after swimming or bathing.
- Tilt your head to drain water from your ears. Pull on your earlobe to straighten out your ear canal and let the water out.
- Wear earplugs if you swim a lot. Your audiologist can make custom molds that fit your ears. You can also use a swim cap to keep your ears dry.
- Don't put anything in your ears! Cotton swabs, fingernails, and pointed objects can scratch your ear canal. This can make it easier to get an infection.
- Earwax helps protect our ears from infection. Ask your doctor how to safely remove earwax.

What should I do if I think I have swimmer's ear?

Swimmer's ear can be treated, so contact your doctor or ENT right away. If you still have hearing problems after treatment, have an audiologist test your hearing.

[Find a certified audiologist on ASHA ProFind online directory.](#)

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Notes:

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For more information about balance problems, preventing falls, hearing loss, hearing aids, or referral to an ASHA-certified audiologist, contact:



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