



# Swimmer's Ear (Otitis Externa)

*Nicole Holmer, M.S., CCC-A, Pediatric Audiologist, Seattle Children's Hospital*

## What is swimmer's ear?

Swimmer's ear is an infection of your outer ear canal. Swimmer's ear can be caused by:

- Moisture trapped in the ear canal
- An injury to the ear canal

Some people with skin conditions 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?

Symptoms include:

- 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

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.

## 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.
- If your ears still seem wet, try using a hair dryer on low and hold it several inches from your ear until your ears feel dry.
- Wear earplugs if you swim a lot. Your audiologist can make 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 if you think you have a problem with wax buildup.

## 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 your hearing tested by an audiologist.

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