

SWIMMER’S EAR – (OTITIS EXTERNA)

If you or your child has had “swimmer’s ear” you know it is painful condition. Swimmer’s ear is caused by prolonged exposure to heat and moisture. The skin of the ear canal begins to break down and is then invaded by bacteria, which cause infection and inflammation.

PREVENTIVE TREATMENT

If your child is susceptible to swimmer’s ear, the best treatment is to try to prevent the condition from occurring, specifically:

- Limit the time in the water to one-hour blocks. Allow the ears to dry completely for an hour before going back in the water. If you child is aware of water in the ear, have him shake head to loosen the water and dry the ear with the corner of a towel (do not use a Q-tip). Try a hair dryer on the low cool setting.
- Make a solution of equal parts vinegar and rubbing alcohol. Put a few drops in each ear after each swim and at bedtime. Allow the solution to stay in the ear for at least five minutes each time. Commercial ear drying drops are also available.
- Do not risk injury or infection to the ear canal by picking at the ears with any object such as a pencil, a cotton swab, or a bobby pin.
- If the ear itches after a long swim or feels as if it is “plugged”, you might be able to prevent infection by keeping the ear dry and making sure nothing is stuck in to it that might cause injury. Dry it with a small tuft of cotton. Cotton swabs on a stick are too big for this purpose.

IF SWIMMER’S EAR OCCURS

If your child has persistent itching and develops pain, see your pediatrician. If swimmer’s ear is diagnosed, eardrops will be prescribed. Two ingredients are contained in the drops – an antibiotic to kill bacteria and cortisone to calm inflammation. Have the child lie still with the affected ear facing up for five minutes to let the drops reach all the way into the ear. If swelling prevents the drops from penetrating into the ear canal, we may insert a wick. More severe cases may require an oral antibiotic as well.

After treatment begins, the child should stay out of the water for seven days. It is permissible to shower or bathe daily and shampoo every other day if the ear is dried immediately afterwards and eardrops are put in.

T:HPA Handouts/Swimmer’s Ear (Otitis Externa)
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