

## FEATURE ARTICLES

# Ear Maintenance in Dogs

Ear cleaning is part of a dog's basic grooming routine. All dogs should have their ears cleaned from time to time but some dogs need more frequent and thorough cleaning than others (especially those prone to ear infections).

Why not discuss ear care with your clients and put together a maintenance program with them. There are also some good videos available that you can recommend.

### WHY CLEAN A DOG'S EARS?

When cleaning the ears we are focused on the external ear canal.

Ear wax and debris can easily build up in the ridges of the external canal. If irritation occurs (either from build-up or from allergies), the canal can become infected. Lack of adequate air flow to the canal can increase the chance of infection. This is part of the reason dogs with long, floppy ears are prone to ear infections. However, some dogs also have an excessive amount of glands in their ear canals and produce too many secretions.

A couple of common dog breeds with genetic predispositions to ear infections include Cocker Spaniels and Basset Hounds. Typically, dogs with ear infections will have an excessive amount of bacteria or yeast in the ears. External ear infections cause itching and pain. They can also lead to middle/inner ear infections that affect hearing and balance. In addition, because dogs with itchy or sore ears tend to shake their heads violently, they can rupture blood vessels in the ear flap and end up with a pocket of blood in the flap called a haematoma. Signs of an ear infection include odour from the ears, frequent shaking of the head, redness of skin inside ears, excessive scratching at ears, and excessive ear discharge/debris.



Regular cleaning can help prevent ear infections. Using an appropriate ear cleaner, you can release wax and debris from the canal and help dry the ear. Dogs can build up wax and debris at a faster rate than people. Some dogs have very little ear build-up and simply need their ears wiped out occasionally. Other dogs need thorough ear cleanings every week or two. Over-cleaning can cause irritation, but under-cleaning can lead to infection.

Talk to your clients about their dog's specific needs.

### DOG EAR CLEANING SUPPLIES

Before you begin to clean the dog's ears, you will need a few supplies:

- Ear cleansing solution: Use a quality ear cleanser. There are several available. Australia's No. 1 ear cleanser is Epi-Otic® from Virbac.
- Cotton balls, cotton pads or gauze squares.
- Cotton-tipped applicators.
- Tweezers or haemostats (for dogs with too much hair in the ear canals).
- A towel or two.



## GETTING STARTED WITH EAR CLEANING

The best place to clean the dog's ears is in the tub or outside. This is a great thing to do just before a bath. Remember: when he shakes his head, ear debris and cleaner has to go somewhere, and that includes the walls and you (so beware). You may wish to wrap a towel around him or place one under him to keep him clean and dry. You may also want a towel to keep you dry!

Before cleaning the ears, inspect them. You can get an idea of how dirty they are and you can check for excess hair. If the dog has a lot of hair coming from the ear canal, that hair may need to be plucked. You can do this with your fingers, tweezers, or hemostats. A special ear powder made for dogs may be helpful in gripping the hair. Talk to the pet owner if necessary about this process.

## HOW TO CLEAN THE DOG'S EARS

Begin by holding the ear flap up and squirting a few drops of ear cleaner on the inside of the flap near the ear opening. Next, gently place the tip of the bottle into the ear and give a gentle squeeze. Do not use an excessive amount of pressure when squeezing the cleanser into the ear.

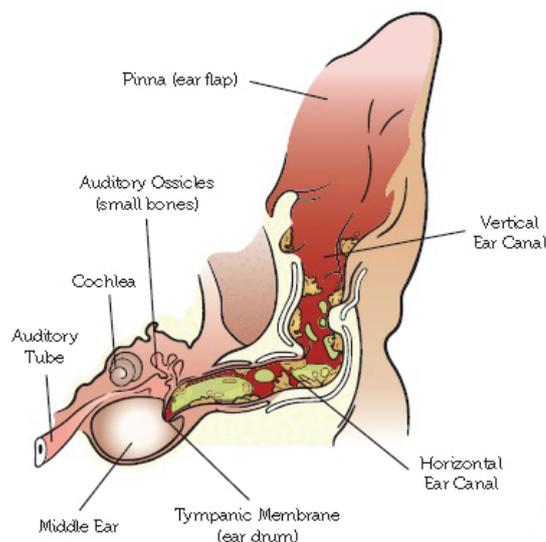
Before he can shake his head, begin massaging the base of the dog's ear (this is the bottom part near the jaw where cartilage can be felt). You should be able to hear a "smacking sound." By massaging, you are helping the cleanser to fill the ridges in the canal and loosen ear debris. After massaging for a few seconds, (more for very dirty ears), you can let go and allow the dog to shake. You might want to turn away or hold up a towel for this part.

Once the dog has had a good shake, use the cotton or gauze and your finger to wipe out the ear canal. You can put your finger in the ear canal but don't force it. You may wish to use



cotton-tipped applicators to clean stubborn debris out of the ridges. **IMPORTANT:** Never put the cotton-tipped applicators into the ear any further than you can see! Damage to the eardrum can occur.

If the ear still seems dirty, you may repeat the process. Then, move on to the other ear. Finish by wiping away any visible debris and drying the dog's head off. Then, reward him with a treat!



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## "HOW TO CLEAN EARS"

There are many videos online about cleaning pets' ears which you can recommend to clients. Virbac host a couple of these on their website and they can be found at:

[www.virbac.com.au/ear-cleaning-videos](http://www.virbac.com.au/ear-cleaning-videos)