

Lifelong Ear Partnership -

Responsible use of antibiotics



We're all ears

Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)

Since the first antibiotics were discovered 70 years ago, these powerful pharmaceuticals have been used to fight bacterial infections in humans and animals all over the world.

Over time, certain bacteria have developed resistance to antibiotics. Although this is a natural phenomenon, it has resulted in some treatments becoming less effective. In fact some infections can't always be dealt with and there is no effective treatment to turn to.

Avoiding resistance

There are regional and national guidelines to prevent unnecessary antibiotic treatment in animals and your vet will be aware of these.

By using antibiotics only where needed, as instructed and for the appropriate period of time, we can all contribute.

In the case of an ear problem, your vet will likely study a sample from your dog's ear under a microscope, a process called cytology. This allows them to visualise bacteria and yeasts before choosing an appropriate treatment. In more unusual cases your vet may also carry out a culture and susceptibility test to identify the type of bacteria causing the overgrowth or infection and see which antibiotic would treat them best.

These investigations often result in vets prescribing an ear medication containing an antibiotic or even a more specialised ear cleaner that has some anti-septic properties, depending on the individual case. Using a topical antibiotic applied directly into the ear is preferable to antibiotic tablets or injections in almost all cases. Medication applied directly to the ear gives high concentrations right where needed. Applying antibiotics just where they are needed means they won't affect beneficial bacteria elsewhere in the body (like the tummy), avoiding the risk of unpleasant side effects like diarrhoea and even more importantly reducing the risk of antimicrobial resistance.

Managing ear problems

In order to decide on the best treatment, your vet team will take all the following factors into account:

Degree of inflammation, signs of overgrowth of bacteria and yeast, any national guidelines on choice of medication and factors specific to you and your dog, including how easy it will be to give medication at home.

Ear cleaning is an important part of managing your dog's ear problem because, in a diseased ear, the natural self-cleaning process is disturbed. Sometimes, regular ear cleaning at an appropriate interval can be enough to control your dog's problems.

Ear medication works better in clean ears, so if your dog is prescribed a product containing antibiotics, ears may be cleaned in the practice or you may be asked to do this at home.

Find out more about treating ear problems by watching this video:



What causes an ear problem?

In the majority of otitis cases, there will be a primary factor which led to the current ear problem. It might be a quick fix like a grass seed in the ear canal or parasites living in the ear, but in the majority of cases, allergic skin disease is the issue. This primary problem might be further complicated by ear shape or perhaps a habit of frequent swimming.

If the primary causes are properly controlled, your pet is less likely to develop ear problems again.

Find out more about primary causes of otitis in this video:



The importance of a revisit

A follow up appointment is essential for many reasons:

1. It allows you to update your vet on how your dog is doing. Hopefully the answer is really well, but if not this can be detected and discussed early. You can even make notes at home beforehand and share these with your vet team.
2. Your vet will probably want to re-examine your dog, the ear itself and to repeat cytology. This provides information on whether the inflammation / infection is resolving as expected – if not, the plan can be changed.
3. Your vet will also want to check that the chosen treatment is working for you. This gives you an opportunity to feedback and express any concerns or challenges. Be honest with your vet team – is there a need for a change in treatment strategy?
4. It's likely that you have thought of more questions surrounding your dog's ear condition – this appointment provides an extra opportunity to find the answers. No question is too small – and your vet team will have heard everything before!



Pet name:

Date and time for re-check:

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