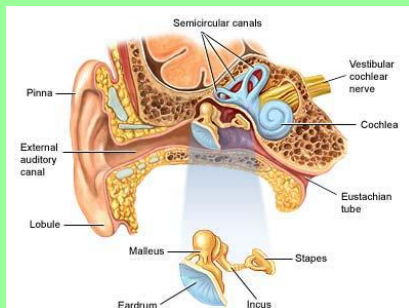


# Otitis Externa

## Definition

A persistent or recurrent inflammation or infection of the external ear and ear canal.

## Anatomical Review



## Causes, Incidence and Risks

- Swimmer's ear is fairly common.
- It usually responds to treatment, but about 1% of cases may become chronic.
- It consists of inflammation, irritation, or infection of the outer ear and ear canal.
- There may be a history of exposure to water or of mechanical trauma to the ear from scratching or foreign objects in the ear.
- Swimming in polluted water is one way to contract swimmer's ear.

The presence of moisture predisposes the ear to infection from fungus or water-loving bacteria such as *Pseudomonas*.

## Prevention

- Dry the ear thoroughly after exposure to moisture.
- Individuals who swim frequently should use earplugs.
- Otitis externa should be treated completely (finish antibiotics).

## Symptoms

- ear pain
  - may worsen with pulling on the external ear
  - itching of the ear or ear canal
- persistent drainage from the ear
  - yellow, yellow-green, pus, or foul smelling drainage
- hearing loss

## Signs and Tests

- Inspection shows the ear to be red and swollen, including the ear canal.
- The eardrum may be difficult to see with the otoscope, or the eardrum may appear red.
- The ear canal may appear eczema-like, with scaly shedding of skin in the canal.
- Touching or manipulating the outer ear increases pain;

## Treatment

- The goal of treatment is cure of the infection, using topical application of ear drops containing antibiotics and corticosteroids.
- If the ear canal is very swollen, a wick may be placed in the ear to allow the drops to travel to the end of the canal.
- Analgesics may be used if pain is severe.
- In the elderly or diabetics with persistent ear pain and/or persistent drainage, the possibility of malignant otitis externa needs to be considered.

## Ear Drops



## Prognosis

Chronic otitis externa usually responds to treatment.

Treatment may be prolonged or repeated. If untreated, complications may develop.

## Complications

- cellulitis (infection of the surrounding skin)
- malignant otitis externa, which can cause bone infection, hoarseness, and difficulty swallowing