



MID-JERSEY PEDIATRICS

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SWIMMER'S EAR (OTITIS EXTERNA)

Signs & Symptoms

- Pain when the earlobe is moved up and down or the ear is otherwise manipulated
- A feeling that the ear is plugged up
- Discharge from the ear

Cause

Swimmer's ear is an infection of the skin lining the ear canal. When water gets trapped in the ear canal the lining may become infected. Children are more likely to get swimmer's ear from swimming pools and lakes rather than the ocean.

Expected Course

With treatment, symptoms should be better in 3-5 days.

Home Treatment

An antibiotic ear drop may be prescribed by your doctor. Fill the ear canal as directed by your doctor. Have your child lie down with the affected ear up. Run the ear drops down the side of the ear, opening and moving the ear, so that air isn't trapped under the drops. Your child should stay in position for 3-5 minutes, then insert a cotton ball for the next 15 minutes as he or she gets up. Use Tylenol or ibuprofen for pain relief. Generally, your child should not swim until the symptoms are gone. It is okay to take a bath or shower.

Prevention

The key to prevention is keeping the ear canals dry when your child is not swimming. After swimming, get all water out of the ear canals by turning the head to the side and pulling the earlobe in different directions to help the water run out. Dry the opening to the ear canal carefully. If your child has frequent episodes of swimmer's ear, an even mixture of white vinegar and rubbing (isopropyl) alcohol can be used for prevention, a few drops in each ear when done swimming for the day.

Common Mistakes

Don't use earplugs of any kind for prevention or treatment. They tend to jam ear wax back into the ear canals. Also, they don't keep all water out of the ear canals, and trapped water can promote swimmer's ear. Cotton swabs also should not be inserted in ear canals.

Call Our Office If:

- The symptoms are not cleared up in 5 days.
- The pain becomes worse after 24 hours of treatment.
- A fever 101.5 or above.
- The ear becomes severely painful.
- You have other concerns or questions.