

# Swimmer's Ear (Otitis Externa)

## *Brief Version*

### **What is swimmer's ear?**

Swimmer's ear is an infection of the skin lining the ear canal. Ear canals need to be dry. When water gets trapped in the ear canal the lining becomes damp and swollen and tends to become infected.

Your child probably has swimmers ear if:

- Your child has itchy and painful ear canals.
- Your child has been swimming recently.
- Your child feels pain when the earlobe is moved up and down.
- Your child feels pain when the tab of the outer ear overlying the ear canal is pushed in.
- The ear feels plugged up.
- There is a slight amount of clear discharge at first. Without treatment, the discharge becomes yellowish.

### **How can I take care of my child?**

- For mild swimmer's ear, use white vinegar mixed with equal parts of water. Fill the ear canal with the vinegar mixture. After 5 minutes, remove it by turning the head to the side. Do this twice a day.
- For severe swimmer's ear, use antibiotic-steroid eardrops. (These require a prescription.) Run the eardrops down the side of the ear opening so that air isn't trapped under the drops. Then move the ear lobe back and forth to help the eardrops go down into the ear. Continue using the eardrops until 48 hours after all the symptoms have cleared up.
- Use acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil) for pain relief.

### **How can I prevent swimmer's ear?**

After the infection is cured, rinse your child's ear canals with rubbing alcohol each time he finishes swimming or bathing.

### **Call your child's doctor right away if:**

- The ear pain becomes severe.
- Your child starts acting very sick.

### **Call your child's doctor during office hours if:**

- The ear becomes severely painful.
- The ear symptoms are not cleared up in 7 days.
- You have other concerns or questions.

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This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.