



PEDIATRICS AND ADOLESCENT MEDICINE, P.A.

OTITIS EXTERNA

External otitis, commonly known as swimmer's ear, occurs when the protective coating of wax in the canal is altered, making it susceptible to infection. This often occurs with frequent water in the ear canal, which leaves the skin irritated. It can also happen following injury to the canal in the form of cotton swabs, fingernails, or a foreign body.

The infection is often caused by bacteria but may be caused by a fungus. There can also be a localized infection in the form of a small abscess of a hair follicle, called a furuncle.

The infection usually starts with itching and a feeling of fullness which may progress to severe pain. If the ear canal is moved by chewing or pulling on the ear, the person may experience pain. Fever is sometimes present.

The treatment for this condition consists of medicated ear drops and avoidance of water or other foreign bodies in the ear. If the condition is severe, a wick can be placed in the ear canal and kept moist with ear drops.

Prevention consists of avoiding cotton-tipped applicators, hair pins, fingernails, or other foreign objects in the ear canal. For swimmers, drops can be used after swimming to try to prevent this condition. Premixed drops may be purchased at the pharmacy or alcohol can be used to dry the canal. One may also mix one part alcohol to one part vinegar, as an alternative.

Despite treatment, otitis externa can get worse. If the patient has persistent severe pain, swelling or redness of the external ear or the area behind the ear, or drainage from the ear, please call us for further evaluation.