

Swimmer's Ear in Children

Swimmer's ear, which doctors call *otitis externa*, is an inflammation of the external ear canal. It occurs when water gets into the ear—usually during swimming or bathing—and does not properly drain. When that happens, the canal can become irritated and infected.

Youngsters with this condition will complain of itching or pain in the ear, the latter particularly when the head or the ear itself is moved. As the canal swells, hearing will decrease. The infected ear may ooze yellowish pus.



Your doctor will diagnose otitis externa after examining the ear canal with an otoscope. He or she may treat it with prescription eardrops. Sometimes you will need to insert a gauze wick into your child's ear to make sure the drops reach the site of the swelling. If it is needed, your physician will demonstrate this procedure. Also, try keeping your child's ear canal as dry as possible during the healing process; that means delaying washing and shampooing until the inflammation has disappeared.

Once a child has had a swimmer's ear infection, you should try to prevent future episodes. To help avoid them, your youngster should place drops in the ears after swimming—either a 70 percent alcohol solution or a mixture of one-half alcohol, one-half white vinegar. Also, dry the ears with a towel immediately after swimming or bathing.

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