External Ear Infection

You have an infection of the external ear canal. This is commonly called "swimmer's ear". It is caused by increased moisture in the ear canal. Earache, itching, pus drainage from the ear, swelling in the ear canal, and temporary hearing loss are often present. Treatment includes antibiotic ear drops, and sometimes oral antibiotics. Medicines to reduce swelling and pain are also used if needed. In more severe infections, the ear canal must be cleaned out and have a wick placed in it.

Except for ear drops, the ear canal must be kept dry until the infection is cured. Do not go swimming and do not use ear plugs as these increase the risk of developing an infection. Cover your ear with a cotton ball covered with petroleum jelly while showering.

Prevention of swimmer's ear is aimed at keeping the ear canal dry. After you swim or bathe, get all the water out of your ear canals by turning your head to the side and pulling the earlobe in different directions to help the water run out. You may find a blow dryer on low setting works well to dry your ears. Dry the opening to the ear canal carefully. If you get repeated infections of the ear canal, place a few drops of rubbing alcohol or 1/2 alcohol, 1/2 white vinegar solution in your ears after bathing to help dry them out; however, do not use alcohol when the ear is infected.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have increased pain or hearing loss, severe headache, high fever, vomiting, other serious symptoms.

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