



Swimmer's Ear (Otitis Externa)

Earaches in children during the summer months are often due to swimmer's ear (otitis externa). This common problem results from repeated moistening of the ear canal without drying the canal after swimming. The moisture allows the water bacteria to thrive and consequently develop and infection in the ear canal. With swimmer's ear the ear hurts but especially when the earlobe is moved.

Prevention of this condition can be accomplished by instilling 3-5 drops of rubbing (isopropyl) alcohol into each ear after swimming. Commercial preparations which will produce the same effect are SWIM-EAR and AQUA-EAR. If preventative measures are not successful and your child has a painful ear that worsens with movement of the ear itself, please contact our office. Initially a trial of antibiotic ear drops (Cortisporin Otic, Colymycin Otic) will be prescribed. If these do not appear to improve the situation, the child should be examined in our office?

Recurrent "swimmer's ear" is quite bothersome as well as frustrating. It is usually caused by a combination of prolonged exposure to heat and moisture (a long swim on a hot day). The best way to deal with it is to prevent it from happening. Here are four things you can do:

1. Limit the time in the water for the child whose infection keeps coming back. The amount will have to be determined by trial and error but in most cases should be less than one hour.
2. Let the ears dry completely for an hour or two before going back in the water. If your child is aware of water in the ear, have him or her shake the head to loosen the water and dry the ear with the corner of a towel. It's okay to take daily showers or baths as long as they are brief and the ears are dried afterwards.
3. If those measures don't work, make a solution of equal parts water and vinegar or water, vinegar and rubbing alcohol. Put a few drops in each ear when the child gets up, after each swim, and at bedtime, and let the solution stay in the ear for at least five minutes each time.
4. In any case, don't pick the ears with a pencil, a cotton ear swab, a bobby pin, or any other object.

Gently moving the ear will help ear drops move deep into the canal. The child should lie with the affected side up for two to three minutes. A small cotton wick inserted in the canal will help keep drops in longer.
