**OTITIS IN DOGS:**
Questions and answers

*Inflammation of the ear canal*

1) **What does my dog's ear look like?**

- **External ear canals:** begins at the outside opening of the ear (ear flap) and extends inward to the vertical and horizontal canals
- **Middle ear:** cavity directly on the other side of the eardrum.
- **Inner ear:** bony structure next to the ear drum where the balance and hearing systems originate

2) **What causes my dog to get an otitis?**

There are many factors that may cause an inflammation of the ear canal. These are divided in 3 categories:

1) **Predisposing factors** increase the risk of developing ear inflammation.
   - Breed predispositions: Ear conformation (e.g. Cocker spaniel have pendulous ears), hair in the ear canals (e.g. Poodles), excessive ear wax production (e.g. Cocker spaniels, Labradors)
   - Excessive moisture (swimmer’s ear; baths...etc)
   - Inadequate or excessive ear cleaning
   - Aggressive hair removal in the ears

2) **Primary factors** which are directly responsible for the inflammation:
   - Parasites: ear mites
   - Food allergies: 50-80% of dogs with food allergies will develop an ear infection. 20-25% of them will have recurrent otitis as the only symptom.
   - Seasonal allergies: during summer, 50-80% of dogs have episode(s) of external ear infections
   - Hypothyroidism
3) **Perpetuating factors** prevent the resolution and/or perpetuate the inflammation:
   - Yeast infection
   - Bacterial infection
   - Inner-Middle ear infection: up to 50% of dogs with external otitis have middle and/or inner ear infections!!
   - Allergic reaction to ear solutions/medications.
   - Inadequate treatment
   - Stenosis of the canal lumen (hardening and narrowing of the canal due to recurrent ear infections)

3) **How can I know my dog has an otitis?**
   When he or she demonstrates one or more of these symptoms:
   - Ear scratching and/or head shaking
   - Redness on the ear flap(s)
   - Presence of abnormal and smelly secretions
   - Sensitive ears
   - Lethargy and loss of appetite
   - Head tilted and/or loss of balance

4) **When should I consult my vet?**
   You should consult your vet as soon as you notice one or more of the symptoms listed above. When untreated for a long period, an external ear infection:
   - May cause hardening, narrowing and thickening of the ear canal
   - Can stimulate the growth of undesirable bacteria
   - May spread deeper and rupture the ear drum, causing an inner and/or middle ear infection.

   These complications will make the diagnostic approach more complex, and will result in a longer and more expensive treatment. Furthermore, your dog may become more susceptible to ear infections in the future!!

5) **Why does my vet need to see my dog for an otitis?**
   The vet needs to...
   - Know your dog’s medical history especially regarding ear and skin problems.
   - Do a complete physical examination
   - Look at an ear secretion sample under the microscope to identify and properly treat the bacteria, yeast and/or parasites involved in the infection.
   - Make additional tests: sometimes an ear secretion sample needs to be sent to a laboratory for specific tests, a sedation/anesthesia needs to be done in order to make a better otoscopic examination or a thorough cleaning of the infected ear must be performed etc.
   - Identify and treat if possible the primary cause(s) of the otitis

6) **Is it necessary to come back three weeks later for another check-up?**
   It is very important to follow your vet’s instructions and be back for another check-up if needed. Most of the time, your dog’s ear may look much better and healed from the outside but a deeper otoscopic examination may reveal that the ear isn’t completely healed.

   **If treatment is stopped too soon, the infection will be back within a few weeks. Numerous ear treatments are painful and frustrating to your dog. Moreover they are costly!!**

**PREVENTION IS ALWAYS BETTER THAN CURE!!!**
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