

Swimmer's Ear

Your child doesn't have to go swimming to end up with the itchy, painful inflammation of the outer ear's skin called otitis externa, or "swimmer's ear." Water that splashes into the outer ear canal during a shower or a shampoo can get trapped in the dark, warm environment near the eardrum. This creates a perfect breeding ground for bacteria. As bacteria burrow in, the skin inside the ear begins to itch and swell. Bacteria may continue to multiply, creating a full-blown infection. By following home treatment procedures, you can help alleviate your child's discomfort and reduce the risk of future cases of swimmer's ear.

Symptoms/Signs:

- Persistent itching or tickling in the outer ear canal (early stages)
- Tugging on the ear
- Fluid draining from the ear
- Pain in the ear canal that worsens when the earlobe is pulled
- Feeling of tenderness or fullness inside the ear
- Crusting in the ear canal
- In the advanced stages, hearing impairment due to pus buildup and inflammation

Consult Your Doctor If Your Child:

- Complains of persistent pain inside the ear canal.
- Has fluid coming out of his or her ear.
- Has crusting in the ear canal.
- Has hearing loss or impairment.

Home Care Ideas:

- Consult with a doctor before using over-the-counter eardrops.
- Your child's doctor may prescribe antibiotic eardrops to clear up the infection.
- Apply heat to reduce pain. Use a heating pad set on low or a covered hot water bottle.
- Never use a cotton swab or any other instrument to remove wax from your child's ear canal. Earwax protects the ear from infection.
- If your child is prone to ear infections, use earplugs whenever he or she swims or showers.
- Allow your child to swim in clean, well-treated swimming pools only. Avoid lakes and ponds.
- After swimming, place eardrops containing acetic acid in each ear according to directions.