



Kapa'a Pediatrics, LLC

## Otitis Externa (Swimmer's Ear)

**Otitis Externa** is an infection of the ear canal (outside ear to ear drum). It is almost always caused by bacteria. Swimming in pools, especially home pools, rivers, stream, and the ocean can cause bacteria to enter the ear canal. If there is any disruption in the normal ear canal skin from a scratch or q-tip use, then bacteria can proliferate. Sometimes wax build up can also trap water with bacteria in the canal.

### Symptoms:

- Ear Pain - Generally the pain is located in the canal, so moving the ear or wiggling your finger in the child's ear causes pain. Usually inside ear infections (otitis media) do not have pain in the canal and moving the ear does not cause pain.
- Swelling and ear displacement- As infection progresses the ear can look swollen or pushed forward.
- Fever - If the infection gets worse it can start to cause fever.

### Treatment:

Although mild otitis externa can resolve without treatment, once the infection takes place it almost always needs treatment. Untreated otitis externa can be deadly and needs to be taken very seriously.

Over the counter "Swimmer's Ear Drops" often contain alcohol or acidic solutions that can be useful to prevent infections if used after swimming but once ear is infected they usually do little to help.

Antibiotic drops are used to coat the ear canal and to fight infection. We require patients to come in and be seen when they have otitis externa because we like to get a baseline exam of the ear before we start drops. Ever year we see 1-2 kids that do not respond to drops and it is helpful to know how the ear has progressed in case of treatment failure.

Motrin is used for pain and can be given every 6 hours for a day while the antibiotic take effect. Tylenol can also be used but generally motrin works better for these infections.

### When to call your doctor:

- No improvement after 48 hours. Pain should start to stabilize at 24 hours and improve from 24-48 hours. You can test this by wiggling the ear.
- Pain. If pain cannot be managed by motrin and tylenol please let us know.

\*\*\* Patient handouts created by Kapa'a Pediatrics are intended to give parents the most common and pertinent facts about a certain issue. If there is ever any concern that your child was given an incorrect diagnosis or is not following the usual expected course for an illness please call us to speak with a physician. (808) 634-8011\*\*\*