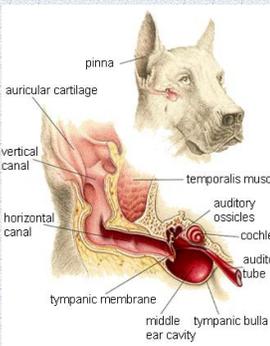


Mountainview Animal Hospital

SPRING NEWSLETTER

The bottom Line

Dogs can hear sounds that are much fainter than we can hear; they can also hear sounds at a much higher frequency than we can.



Food allergies are thought to cause 10 - 20 % of allergic skin disease (including ear infections) in dogs.

Diagnosing food allergies requires the exclusive feeding of a novel protein and carbohydrate diet to your pet for 12 weeks.

In dogs we choose Z/D ultra to feed during the food trial. Cheating is not tolerated; this means no treats, people food or even raw hide bones.

FOCUS ON EAR INFECTIONS

If you have ever owned a dog, then you have likely had experience in treating an ear infection. Although very common, in most cases ear infections are relatively straightforward to treat. Unfortunately, some of you have experienced the frustration of the 'chronic ear infection' that just won't go away or keeps coming back. It is to you, the worn and weary warriors of pets with chronic Otitis Externa (inflammation of the external ear canal) that we dedicate this newsletter.

The Cause:

Ears normally produce a thin layer of wax which helps to keep the ear canals healthy. There is a normal amount of bacteria and yeast that live in this waxy coating. If the dog's ears become inflamed, the glands that produce the wax become over active and heat is produced. Heat and moisture allow the bacteria and yeast to grow in vast numbers producing an infection. The following are some predisposing factors that contribute to the development of ear inflammation and infection in our pets.

- **The shape:** Unlike our straight ear canals which drain easily, especially when we lie down, dogs and cats have an L-shaped canal that runs down, then in from the outer ear to the inner ear drum. Ear debris and infection has to work its way out and upwards to clear.
- **Excessive ear wax, hair or moisture in the ear canals:**
 - Excessive wax and hair within the canals can lead to ear infections by promoting bacteria to grow. The natural balance of bacteria and yeast becomes unstable resulting in painful and irritated ear canals.
 - Too much swimming and bathing can contribute to ear infections by damaging the lining of the ear canals.
- **Ear mites:** These are tiny insects that live inside the ear. When they bite, they irritate the lining of the ear canal stimulating more wax production. The accumulation of wax, mites and debris promote bacterial growth and an infection ensues. Ear mites are more common in puppies and kittens.
- **Foreign bodies** like grass awns and foxtails can get into the ears and cause irritation. Cotton ball left in the ears after grooming can also be a problem.
- **Growths within the ear canal:** Certain tumours and polyps can grow in the ear canal; they prevent air circulation and promote wax accumulation.
- **Allergies:** This is without a doubt the most common and frustrating predisposing factor for chronic ear infections. Dogs can be allergic to food or environmental exposure, both inside and outside the home.
- **Hormone imbalances:**
 - Hypothyroidism is the underproduction of thyroid hormone. A lack of this hormone influences the immune system and weakens the body's ability to fight off infection.
 - Cushing's disease is the overproduction of natural steroids in the body. Too much steroid directly suppresses the immune system.

The bottom Line

Some dogs, particularly if they have had ongoing or recurring infections, will show almost no signs of discomfort; almost as though they have given up and have learned to live with the pain. If you own one of those dogs, don't be fooled, their ears still need attention.

We often receive requests from clients to renew antibiotic ear medications over the telephone because they believe it is the same infection as last time. Unfortunately, we rarely oblige that request. This is not done to frustrate our clients; we like our clients. It is because as doctors we are aware that prescribing a medication without examining the problem can be very harmful.

To give you an example:

Recently, we angered a client when we insisted the dog be seen before renewing ear medication. Lucky we did. Although the infection looked the same to the client, we notice a slight difference. The bacteria in this infection would not have responded to the same medication as last time and would have cost the dog his hearing. The client is not upset with us anymore.

- **Genetics:** Certain breeds are genetically prone to ear infections. The Shar-pei and Cocker spaniel breeds are notorious in the veterinary world for having chronically inflamed ears. Other breeds like the Labrador retriever have difficulty to control ear problems because of their tendency to get water in their ears from swimming and their genetic predisposition to allergies.

The Symptoms:

- Scratching of the ears
- Head shaking
- Foul odour emitting from the ears
- Excessive wax
- Redness/swelling
- Scratches on the ear flaps
- Dry scabby surface on the inner ear
- Lethargy
- Sensitivity to touch

The Treatment

The majority of patients with ear infections can be managed successfully with topical ear medication only. Patients that have non-responsive or recurrent infections will need to have further diagnostics to identify the underlying problem. We will often recommend doing an ear swab first. Ear swab cytology involves taking a sample of the debris within the ears, staining it with a special dye and then looking at it under the microscope. This in-clinic procedure can be very informative in helping us to develop a treatment plan. If we detect certain bacteria microscopically, then additional oral antibiotics would be added to work together with the topical medications. Sometimes we find yeast instead of bacteria, so we will select an anti-fungal medication rather than an antibiotic. Chronic ear infections can be extremely painful and sometimes require an anti-inflammatory to help decrease the pain and swelling. An anti-inflammatory may also help to open up the ear canals and allow the ear medication to get to the infection; more importantly it may make your pet feel better.

Once a medication is prescribed, it is very important to follow the instructions carefully. With topical ear medications, we recommend that a generous amount be applied deep into the canal, then massage the base of the ear for 15 seconds. If the ears are full of debris/wax, an ear cleaner can be used before the ear medication is placed. We recommend waiting at least 20 minutes before any medicated drops are placed in the ears to prevent the dilution of the medicated drops.

The Follow-up Appointment

The follow up appointment is extremely important! We usually like to see the patient back in 2 weeks once topical treatment has been started. The purpose of this appointment is to see if the infection has truly resolved. Often clients assume because their pet is showing less symptoms and the smell is gone, that the infection is over. Unfortunately, that is not always the case. Many infections will have improved only partially and fool pet owners into complacency. Re-examining the ears with an otoscope is the only way we can be sure the infection has really been resolved and that your pet is truly comfortable. Sometimes we may also repeat an ear swab to check if the bacterial numbers have decreased. If we are not satisfied with the progress, we may change the medication or simply prolong the treatment protocol. In most cases, after a few weeks of home treatment, the ear infection is gone.

The Ear Infection That Doesn't Resolve

In stubborn cases, where the infection does not improve or just returns as soon as the medication has stopped, we may need to start looking for other underlying causes that are interfering with the normal healing process.

The bottom Line

Careful.

If your pet has never had an ear infection or waxy ears, then leave them alone. Over cleaning and plucking of ear hair can irritate the glands inside the ear and actually stimulate more wax production and inflammation.

Remember, if it is not broken, don't fix it.

Following directions carefully is important.

Many people stop using the medication early when the ear "looks better". Keep in mind that if there is still infection deeper in the canal where you cannot see, you may be contributing to bacterial resistance to the antibiotic.

See our website www.mountainviewanimalhospital.ca for instructions with pictures on how to give your dog or cat ear medication.

Ear infections in cats are far less common than in dogs. Most ear infection seen in cats are secondary to ear mites, infected bite wound from cat fights and polyps growing from the inner ear canal.

- Culture and Sensitivity – identifies the exact organism causing the infection and which antibiotic it is sensitive to.
- Blood tests – looking for health issues and hormonal imbalances that are compromising the immune system.
- Food trials – to diagnose and treat a food allergy.
- Allergy testing – to diagnose and treat environmental or seasonal allergies.

Prevention

Once your pet has had a few ear infections they become more prone to getting another one. Each infection causes the ear canals to become inflamed, scarred and narrower. In addition, the wax glands become larger and more active. This then starts a vicious cycle. For those pets who are somewhat prone to ear infections, particularly those that like to swim or have chronically waxy ears, prevention may become important. We may prescribe a regular ear cleaning protocol with an appropriate veterinary approved ear cleaner. Cleaning your pet's ears once to twice weekly will help to keep the canals free of wax and moisture which in return will help to maintain the natural flora balance.

How To Instill Ear Medication

- Hold the pinna (ear flap) straight up above the head. This will open up the ear canal. If your pet's ears are very inflamed and painful, you may have to start gently.
- Point the tip of the medicine bottle or ear cleaning bottle a few millimetres into the ear canal to assure that the medication or cleaner goes into the ear canal. Do not force the tip of the bottle into the ear; this can cause pain and injury.
- Squeeze a few drop of the medication or cleaner into the ear. Apply a few drops to the pinna as well.
- Still holding the pinna up, gently massage the base of the ear to help distribute the medication throughout the ear canal. Most dogs enjoy this part.
- If you are cleaning the ear, gently wipe the discharge with cotton. Do not use Q-tips, they can pack the ear wax further into the canal or damage the ear drum.
- Reward you pet for good behaviour.

TIME WITH TUX

This spring, it will be a year since I moved into Mountainview Animal Hospital and I am having a great time. As I wrote in the last newsletter, I am the self designated client and patient greeter; I love that job but have found with my extreme energy levels that I need to do more. So I have decided to also be the resident food inspector and taste tester. I know my predecessor Nike used to go after the staffs' lunches; her talent in stealing people food was legendary. So rather than compete with a legend, I have decided to put a whole new spin on the job. Several times a day, I sneak into the pet food cupboard and inspect the bags of food. I test the integrity of the bag by biting it in several places. Once I have decided if the bag is sturdy enough, I then chew a larger hole in the corner so I can sample the food. So far I have not found one that I don't like; the Doctors here at the clinic only seem to carry the best. I have had to become very efficient at this job though because I am constantly being interrupted by the humans. I am not sure why they keep chasing me away from my job but I promise not to loose focus.



The bottom Line

An infected dog can have over 200 heartworms in the heart and adjoining blood vessels.

The drug companies that produce the various heartworm preventative medications will guarantee your dogs protection only if you use the medication correctly and have your dog's blood tested every year.

Most boarding facilities will require your dog to have had a Kennel Cough vaccine at least five days before admission.

Many puppy training facilities are also strongly recommending the Kennel Cough vaccine to their clients.

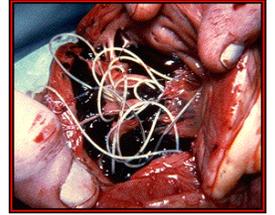
Leptospirosis is a Zoonotic disease; meaning people can become infected too.

Caution! Some flea products marketed in the pet stores to dogs are extremely toxic to cats. Always read the label carefully; better yet, ask us about choosing the safest products for your pets.

*** IMPORTANT SUMMERTIME REMINDERS ***

Heartworm Disease

Heartworm disease is caused by a large worm which can live in a dog's heart and adjoining blood vessels. Permanent and potentially fatal damage to the heart, lungs and liver can occur long before there are any visible signs. The heartworm is spread from one dog to another by the mosquito. Treatment is available but is often costly and difficult. A long recovery time can be expected and often irreparable damage to the heart, lungs and liver has already occurred.



Fortunately, prevention is so easy. Simply give your dog the preventative medication once a month from June through November. There are various types of heartworm medication available; some will also include prevention for intestinal worms and/or fleas. Blood testing your dog prior to starting the medication is an important part of prevention and is strongly recommended. Early detection of a heartworm infection before your dog gets sick will not only increase the success of the treatment and ensure a complete recovery, but will also help reduce the spread of the disease.

Leptospirosis Vaccine

Leptospirosis is a serious and sometimes fatal disease that can afflict dogs of all ages. Dogs most commonly become infected by drinking from rivers, streams, puddles or ponds that have become contaminated by the urine of other infected animals (raccoons, rats and skunks). Leptospirosis tends to attack the liver and kidneys causing a variety of symptoms including fever, nausea, lethargy, abdominal pain and increased urination. Many dogs afflicted with Leptospirosis will die from it. If your dog has access to wildlife, roams free, or drinks from water sources that may have become contaminated, he or she should be vaccinated against Leptospirosis this spring. We would be happy to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of vaccinating your dog against this disease.

Kennel Cough Vaccine

Bordetella bronchiseptica, better known as Kennel Cough, is a bacterial infection that causes tracheobronchitis. Affected dogs will exhibit a characteristic dry, harsh, hacking cough that can last up to 3 weeks. Some dogs will cough so hard that they gag afterward. Dogs are most commonly infected in kennels, pet stores, exhibitions, grooming salons and off leash parks where they are in close contact with other dogs. Although most dogs require only supportive care to recover, young, older or otherwise weaker dogs can develop a serious pneumonia that may require them to be hospitalized. Vaccination is recommended for dogs going to boarding kennels, puppy classes, grooming facilities or off leash parks. If your dog is not vaccinated against Kennel Cough and is likely to be exposed, please call us to schedule an appointment for a vaccination against *Bordetella bronchiseptica*.

Fleas



Both cats and dogs are at risk of becoming infested with fleas during our warm summer months. Fleas are extremely irritating to your pet. Flea bites can cause itchy skin rashes and even serious allergic reactions. Left untreated, just 10 adult fleas can multiply to over 250,000 fleas in only 30 days! Your pet can come into contact with fleas on walks, at the park, or even in your backyard. Those of you who have had fleas in the past know how difficult it is to get rid of them; prevention of flea infestations is much easier, cost effective and safe. Call us to start your pet on the safest and most effective flea prevention this spring.