



# Monroe Pet Press



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## Ear Infections and Your Dog

Did you know that according to pet insurance statistics the number one problem seen in dogs are ear infections? This common problem often has an underlying cause, especially if recurrences are often seen.

Some breeds of dogs are more prone to ear infections. Cocker spaniels and cocker spaniel crosses, which produce more wax than other breeds, are especially likely to have otitis. Other breeds that often get ear infections include labrador retrievers, golden retrievers, beagles, and Basset Hounds.

Signs of ear infections are often of a short or acute nature. These include pain on examining the ear, redness, or odor. A yellow or brown discharge may be seen and an unpleasant odor may be noticed. In addition, dogs with ear infections may shake and scratch their head due to the pain. This can further cause trauma to the ear and make the problem worse. Infections of the outer ear canal are known as otitis externa.

Ear infections are usually diagnosed on physical examination. Visualization of the ear canal is important to verify that the ear drum is intact. At the Monroe Animal

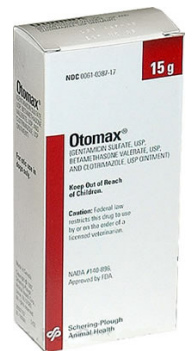
Hospital, we use a state-of-the-art video otoscope for this purpose. Often a diagnostic test called cytology is also performed. A swab is inserted into the ear and some of the debris is placed onto a slide for staining. Under the microscope the discharge

is evaluated for number of skin or white blood cells, and types of organisms. Common causes of infection include yeast (*Malassezia*), cocci (including staph and strep species), and rods (*E. coli* or *Pseudomonas* species). It is important to determine the causes of the infection as choice of cleaning solutions used as well as medications are influenced by the cause. If rod shaped bacteria are seen, a culture may be performed as



these types of bacteria are often resistant to many common antibiotics.

Due to the much longer structure of a dog's ear canals as well as the volume of debris, oral medications usually do not work in clearing ear infections. Therefore topical medications are invariably necessary. These include antibiotics, anti-inflammatories, anti-fungals, or combinations of these drugs. In addition, cleaning solutions are important as aides to treatment as they help to remove dirt, debris, pus, and old medication. Also, some of the cleaning solutions used have direct anti-bacterial or anti-fungal effects of their own. Dogs that are prone to recurrent problems should have their ears cleaned on a once to twice weekly basis long-term to try to reduce the risk of recurrence and to try to create an environment that is less conducive to new infections from developing.



If the ear infection is long-standing, then a middle or inner ear infection is likely (otitis media or interna). These will often need to be treated more aggressively and for a longer period of time than simple otitis externa.

Most veterinary dermatologists agree that recurrent ear infections in dogs usually have an underlying allergy as a cause. This makes sense because anything that affects the skin is likely to affect the ears as well. In the case of chronic ear problems food allergies should be ruled out initially. If improvement on a hypoallergenic diet trial is not noted after 4-16 weeks, then an inhalant allergy may be playing a role. Long-term antihistamines, anti-inflammatory medications, and/or allergy testing may be indicated.

## Dog Myths

One common canine myth we hear is a dry nose in a dog is a sign of illness. Many people believe a healthy dog has a wet nose. Unfortunately, this is not true. All a wet nose in a dog means is the air is humid. Just like anything else,

when it's humid outside, your dog's nose gets wet. If it is dry outside (or inside) then your dog's nose will be as well

Another misconception is that you can tell how your dog is feeling by touching its nose. Again, this is inaccurate. A dog's nose temperature changes based on the environment it is in. If it's warm where your dog is, your dog's nose will be warm; if it's cold, your dog's nose will be colder.



The only accurate way to take your dog's temperature is with a rectal thermometer. There are many OTC digital thermometers that can do this (often in less than ten seconds). Normal body temperature for a dog ranges between 100-102 degrees fahrenheit.

One of the most common dog stories that we hear is that dog's eat grass to make themselves vomit because they are sick or that they are aware of some deficiency in their diet.

In order to test these hypotheses, veterinarians\* at the University of California-Davis vet school designed surveys to question 1600 pet owners. The results showed that:

- 80% of healthy dogs with access to plants had eaten grass or other plants
- 68% of responders stated that their dogs ate plants daily or weekly
- Only 8% of dogs exhibited signs of illness prior to ingesting plant material
- Only 22% of dogs vomited after eating plants

Dogs showing signs of illness before eating plants were more likely to vomit than those who appeared healthy beforehand. Younger



dogs were more likely to eat plants, but less likely to appear ill prior to eating or vomit after eating the plant material. So in most cases, grass eating is a common behavior in normal dogs

and has no correlation with illness. Additionally, most dogs do not appear to routinely vomit after eating grass.

\*KL Chieko Sueda, BL Hart and K Davis Cliff.  
Characterisation of plant eating in dogs. Applied Animal Behaviour Science 2008, Vol 111, N 1-2, p. 120-132.

## Exotic Pets



Did you know that the Monroe Animal Hospital doesn't just treat dogs and cats? We also see a variety of non-traditional pets including birds, ferrets, rabbits, guinea pigs, chinchillas, sugar gliders, mice, rats, hamsters, gerbils, snakes, turtles, and lizards!

Having the right husbandry is critical when owning these pets. Health issues are generally rare but often will occur if the environment is not correct. Some species have exacting requirements in nature which need to be duplicated in the home enclosure. Particular attention needs to be paid to bedding, temperature and diet. In the case of most reptiles and birds provisions need to be made for exposure to unfiltered ultraviolet light. For some species, humidity and ventilation is also important.

Diet is especially important. Many people erroneously believe that birds should mainly eat seeds, when a cornerstone of a pet bird's diet should be pre-formulated pellets supplemented with fruits and vegetables. We see a lot of turtle owners who only feed pellets or sticks when for aquatic species this should not be more than 25% of their diet. Pelleted diets are also preferred for most rodent species. Of special note are guinea pigs who, like people, have a need for Vitamin C supplementation to avoid scurvy.

Most reptile species need an external source of heat. Hot rocks are not safe and should not be used. Outside the enclosure heating lamps and ceramic heating elements are preferred.

Parasites are fairly common in many exotic pets. We recommend stool examinations on all reptiles, ferrets, and rabbits. Up to 50% of store and breeder bought reptiles have been shown to be harboring worm or other parasites that could negatively impact their health.

Also of concern is Salmonella bacteria. Any snake, turtle, or lizard could carry this organism that is potentially contagious to people. Appropriate sanitation is important to prevent infection in people.

Like dogs and cats, we recommend that exotic pets be seen regularly to avoid health issues that could negatively impact them or their human caregivers.