

# Swimmer's Ear: Care Instructions



## Your Care Instructions

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Swimmer's ear (otitis externa) is inflammation or infection of the ear canal. This is the passage that leads from the outer ear to the eardrum. Any water, sand, or other debris that gets into the ear canal and stays there can cause swimmer's ear. Putting cotton swabs or other items in the ear to clean it can also cause this problem.

Swimmer's ear can be very painful. But you can treat the pain and infection with medicines. You should feel better in a few days.

**Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety.** Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

## How can you care for yourself at home?

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### Cleaning and care

- Use antibiotic drops as your doctor directs.
- Do not insert ear drops (other than the antibiotic ear drops) or anything else into the ear unless your doctor has told you to.
- Avoid getting water in the ear until the problem clears up. Use cotton lightly coated with petroleum jelly as an earplug. Do not use plastic earplugs.
- Use a hair dryer set on low to carefully dry the ear after you shower.
- To ease ear pain, hold a warm washcloth against your ear.
- Take pain medicines exactly as directed.
  - If the doctor gave you a prescription medicine for pain, take it as prescribed.

- If you are not taking a prescription pain medicine, ask your doctor if you can take an over-the-counter medicine.

## Inserting ear drops

- Warm the drops to body temperature by rolling the container in your hands. Or you can place it in a cup of warm water for a few minutes.
- Lie down, with your ear facing up.
- Place drops inside the ear. Follow your doctor's instructions (or the directions on the label) for how many drops to use. Gently wiggle the outer ear or pull the ear up and back to help the drops get into the ear.
- It's important to keep the liquid in the ear canal for 3 to 5 minutes.

## When should you call for help?

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**Call your doctor now** or seek immediate medical care if:

- You have a new or higher fever.
- You have new or worse pain, swelling, warmth, or redness around or behind your ear.
- You have new or increasing pus or blood draining from your ear.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- You are not getting better after 2 days (48 hours).

### Where can you learn more?

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Go to <https://www.healthwise.net/PatientEd>

Enter **C706** in the search box to learn more about "**Swimmer's Ear: Care Instructions**".

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