

Ear Cleaning

- Ear cleaning can help treat or prevent ear problems.
- Follow your veterinarian's recommendations closely.
- Always put health and safety first. If the procedure seems dangerous to you or very painful for your pet, stop and consult your veterinarian.

The Basics

Ear cleaning can help treat or prevent ear problems. Some pets are prone to ear problems and may need regular ear cleanings between veterinary visits. Ear cleaning can help remove dirt and wax that can prevent medications from reaching inflamed areas. It can also get rid of allergens and microbes that may contribute to inflammation or infection.

Ear cleaning can be relatively easy, as long as you follow a few simple guidelines. The most important guideline is to always put health and safety first. If, for any reason, your pet becomes so agitated that you feel you are at risk of being bitten or scratched, stop. If the procedure seems excessively painful for your pet, stop and get your veterinarian's advice.

Follow Recommendations

The ear is a very delicate structure. It is very important to closely follow your veterinarian's recommendations regarding ear cleanings. Treating too frequently or too aggressively can make the problem worse, not better. Sensitive, already inflamed parts of the ear can be damaged. Because some ear washes contain chemicals and drying agents, it is important to use only products recommended by a veterinarian.

What You Need

- Old clothes
- Safe, easy-to-clean work area (e.g., tile or linoleum floor, water-resistant walls)
- Towel
- Nonirritating ear wash or rinse recommended by your veterinarian
- Cotton balls or tissues

Technique

There are several techniques for home ear cleaning. The simplest one is described here.

- Choose a space that's easy to clean (e.g., bathroom, laundry room, shower stall), or take your pet outside. Ear cleaning can be messy.
- Wear old clothes and keep a towel handy.
- If necessary, gently restrain your pet (*see box*). You may need a helper.
- Hold the ear solution bottle just over the opening of the affected ear and gently squeeze the prescribed amount of solution into the ear. Do not squeeze the bottle too hard, as a powerful stream can irritate tender, inflamed ear structures. **Note:** If an ear medication requires refrigeration, do not store it at room temperature; however, allow it to reach room temperature before use to make it more comfortable for your pet.
- Fold the earflap down against your pet's head and try to prevent your pet from shaking his or her head too much. Gently massage the very base of the ear to distribute the solution as far as possible into the ear canal. Ask your veterinarian to demonstrate this massage.
- Keep the solution in the ear for the prescribed amount of time.

Signs of Ear Trouble

- Odor
- Scratching/rubbing at ears or side of head
- Discharge
- Debris
- Shaking/tilting of the head
- Pain
- Head shyness (not wanting the head or ears to be touched)
- Irritability

Home Care

- Allow your pet to shake his or her head to remove some of the solution. (This is the messy part.)
- Use cotton balls or tissues to gently wipe away any discharge, loosened debris, and remaining liquid from the earflap, side of the neck, hair below the ear, and opening of the ear canal. Cotton swabs should not be used because a sudden shake of the head or slip of the hand could result in a cotton swab puncturing the delicate eardrum or pushing debris inside the inner ear canal.

Restraining Your Pet

Although some pets are willing to sit or lie quietly while you clean their ears, most object, at least at first. Here are some tips on how to keep your pet from wiggling while you work:

- Place your pet on a stable work surface that you can stand next to, and allow him or her to lie down, either in an upright “sphinx” position or flat on his or her side. While standing next to your pet, put the arm you will use to treat the ear over your pet’s shoulders, and use your upper arm and elbow to press your pet against your torso to help keep him or her still. You can wrap your other arm under or over your pet’s neck to hold the ear open and earflap back. If necessary, move to your pet’s other side or turn your pet around to treat the other ear.
- If you don’t have a high work surface, you can use the same method while seated on the floor, either holding the front of your pet’s body partially against your body or on your lap. If you have a large dog, you can stand behind him or her and have him or her sit back against your legs. Sometimes it helps to back the pet into a corner.
- Small dogs and cats can be wrapped in a large towel and held against your body, leaving only the head free. Be sure not to wrap your small pet too tightly.
- If your pet struggles, talk to him or her calmly. Stop if he or she becomes extremely agitated. Massaging the base of the ears (unless they are painful) should feel good to the pet and may help calm him or her enough that you can resume treatment.
- Be sure to reward good behavior.