

Swimmer's Ear

Prevent Swimmer's Ear

If your ear feels moist or blocked after swimming hair-washing, showering, etc. put your head over with that ear up, put the ear upwards and backwards and instill the eardrops into it. Wiggle your ear to get the drops to go all the way down in, and then turn your head to let them drain out,

If yours is a frequently recurring problem, your doctor may instead recommend placing oily (or lanolin) ear drops in your ears before swimming to protect them from the effects of the water.

Why Do Ears Itch?

An itchy ear is a maddening symptom. Sometimes it comes from a fungus (especially in acute cases), but more often it is a chronic dermatitis (skin inflammation) of the ear canal. One type is seborrheic dermatitis, a condition similar to dandruff in the scalp; the wax is dry, flaky, and abundant. Some patients with this problem will do well to decrease their intake of foods that aggravate it, such as greasy foods, carbohydrates (sugar and starches), and chocolate. Doctors often prescribe an oily or cortisone containing eardrop to use at bedtime whenever the ears itch. There is no long-term cure, but it can be kept under control. Itchy ears in a few patients are caused by allergies that require specific medical treatment.

Patients with itchy, flaky ears or ears that accumulate wax are very likely to develop "swimmer's ear." They should be especially conscientious about using the alcohol ear drops as described above whenever water gets trapped into the ears. They also do well to get their ears cleaned out each year before the swimming season starts.

What About Gnats, Insects, and Foreign objects?

Of the many types of insects that can get into the ears, gnats, moths, and roaches are the most common. Gnats get tangled in the wax and cannot fly out. Bigger insects cannot turn around; neither can they crawl backwards, They keep on struggling, though, and their motion can be painful and frightening.

Gnats are easily washed out with warm water from a rubber bulb syringe. (Remember to dry the ear out afterwards with alcohol drops.) For a big insect, the first step is to fill the ear with mineral oil, which plugs off the breathing pores of the insect and kills it. It takes 5 to 10 minutes or so. Then see the doctor to get the insect removed.

Beads, pencil lead, erasers, bits of plastic toys and dried beans are common objects that children put into their ears. Removal is a delicate task - one for the doctor to perform.