



Stay safe this summer! Something as simple as swimming can be a health hazard. Swimmer's ear, also known as otitis externa, is an infection or inflammation of the outer ear canal. It is commonly associated with water exposure but can also be caused by other factors.

## Here Are Some Key Facts About Swimmer's Ear:

### Causes

#### Water Exposure

Prolonged exposure to water, especially in swimming pools, lakes, and oceans, can lead to the development of swimmer's ear. Water can create a moist environment that fosters bacterial growth.

#### Bacteria and Fungi

Bacteria such as *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* and fungi can infect the ear canal, particularly when the protective earwax is washed away.

#### Ear Trauma

Scratching the ear canal with objects like cotton swabs, fingers, or hearing aids can cause small breaks in the skin, allowing bacteria to enter.

#### Skin Conditions

Conditions like eczema or psoriasis can also predispose individuals to swimmer's ear by causing breaks in the skin.

### Symptoms

#### Itching

Itching in the ear canal is often one of the first symptoms.

#### Discharge

## Pain

Ear pain, which can become severe and may radiate to the face, neck, or side of the head.

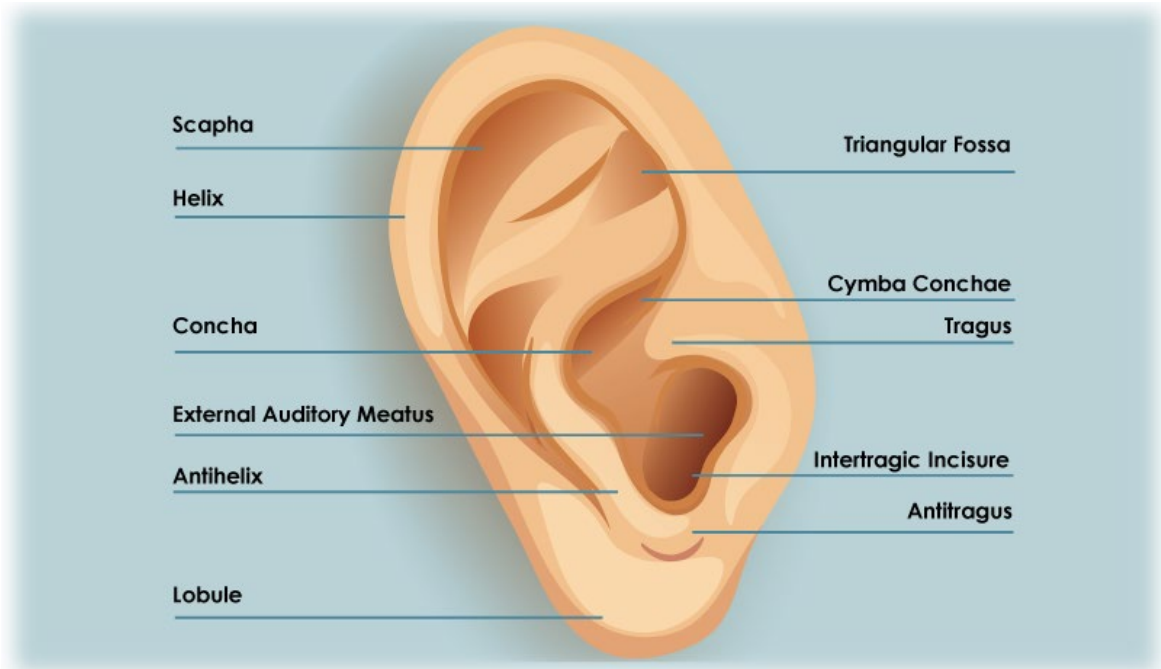
Clear, odorless discharge from the ear, which can become pus-like if the infection progresses.

## Swelling

Swelling of the ear canal, sometimes causing a feeling of fullness or blockage.

## Hearing Loss

Temporary hearing loss due to swelling and blockage of the ear canal.



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## Diagnosis

### Physical Examination

A healthcare provider will examine the ear canal using an otoscope to look for signs of redness, swelling, and discharge.

### Swab Tests

In some cases, a swab of the ear discharge may be taken to identify the specific bacteria or fungi causing the infection.

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## Treatment

### Ear Drops

Prescription ear drops containing antibiotics, antifungals, steroids, or a

## Prevention

### Dry Ears

combination of these are commonly used to treat swimmer's ear.

### **Pain Relief**

Over-the-counter pain relievers like acetaminophen or ibuprofen can help alleviate pain.

### **Keep Ear Dry**

It is important to keep the affected ear dry during the treatment period. Avoid swimming and protect the ear during bathing.

### **Ear Wick**

In severe cases, a healthcare provider may insert a wick into the ear canal to help deliver medication more effectively.

Thoroughly dry ears after swimming or bathing, using a towel or a hairdryer on a low, cool setting.

### **Ear Plugs**

Use earplugs when swimming to keep water out of the ear canal.

### **Avoid Inserting Objects**

Do not insert objects like cotton swabs or fingers into the ear canal.

### **Acidic Drops**

Using over-the-counter acetic acid ear drops after swimming can help maintain the natural acidity of the ear canal and prevent infections.

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## **Complications**

### **Chronic Infection**

Repeated or untreated infections can lead to chronic otitis externa.

### **Cellulitis**

The infection can spread to the surrounding skin, leading to a condition called cellulitis.

### **Hearing Loss**

Persistent infections and inflammation can cause long-term hearing loss.

### **Bone and Cartilage Damage**

In rare, severe cases, the infection can spread to the bones and cartilage around the ear, causing a serious condition known as malignant otitis externa, particularly in individuals with diabetes or weakened immune systems.

Proper management and preventive measures can significantly reduce the risk of developing swimmer's ear and its associated complications. If symptoms persist or worsen, seeking medical attention is important for appropriate treatment.

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