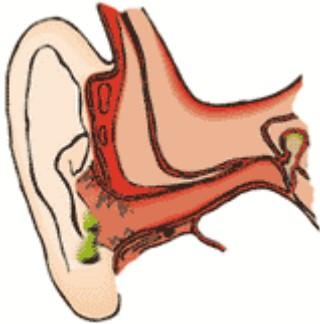


Swimmer's ear is an infection of the ear canal. If you stick your finger in your ear, you're feeling a little of the ear canal. But if you have swimmer's ear, and you stick your finger in your ear - YOW! Let's find out more about this painful ear infection, which very often affects swimmers.

Swimmer's ear - sometimes called **otitis externa** (say: o-**tie**-tis ek-**stur**-nuh) - is different from a regular ear infection. Usually, when people say a kid has an ear infection, they mean **otitis media** (say: **me**-dee-uh), an [infection](#) of the middle ear. This might happen when the kid gets a cold.



But swimmer's ear happens when bacteria grow in the ear canal, which leads to the eardrum. In that canal, you'll find delicate [skin](#) that's protected by a thin coating of [earwax](#). Most of the time, water can run in and out of the ear canal without causing a problem. For instance, you don't usually get swimmer's ear from taking baths or showers.

Bacteria get a chance to grow when water stays in the ear canal and it washes away the protective coating of earwax. A lot of swimming can wash away that wax protection and lead to these wet conditions in the ear canal. Bacteria grow and the ear canal gets red and swollen.

How Do I Know if I Have Swimmer's Ear?

Swimmer's ear may start with some itching, but try not to scratch because this can worsen the infection. Ear pain is the most common sign of swimmer's ear. Even touching or bumping the outside of the ear can hurt. The infection also could make it harder to hear with the infected ear because of the swelling that happens in the ear canal.

If a [doctor](#) thinks you have swimmer's ear, he or she will help you get rid of the infection. To do that, the doctor will probably prescribe eardrops that contain an antibiotic to kill the bacteria. Sometimes, the doctor may use a wick. Not the wick on a candle! This kind of wick is like a little sponge the doctor puts in your ear. The medicine goes into the sponge and it keeps the medicine in contact with the ear canal that's infected.

Use the drops as long as your doctor tells you to, even if your ear starts feeling better. Stopping too soon can cause the infection to come back. If your ear hurts, the doctor may suggest that your parent give you a children's pain medication. This can help you feel better while you're waiting for the antibiotic to work.

When Can I Go Back in the Pool?

The question every kid wants to know is: "When can I swim again?" You'll have to ask your doctor, but be prepared to wait a little bit. It could be as long as a week to 10 days before the doctor says OK. That's a bummer in the summer, but it's better than having that awful ear pain again!

If you have a big problem with swimmer's ear or you're a kid who's always in the water, the doctor may suggest ways for you to protect yourself. For instance, your mom or dad can get some special drops to put in your ears after swimming to dry up the water in there. It's an extra step that just might keep your ears in super shape all summer!

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Date reviewed: May 2005

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A rinse of ½ white vinegar and ½ water can be used twice a day for mild swimmers ear. Fill the ear canal for 5 minutes in each ear. Acetaminophen or ibuprofen can be given for pain. Warm compresses to the ear for 2 minutes can help reduce pain and increase drainage. Remember to dry ears well, shake all water from ears by turning head to the side and moving the ear. Symptoms should resolve in 3 days.