

### **Outer ear infections (Otitis Externa)**

This is an infection of the skin of the ear canal and is very common.

It often occurs 'out of the blue' for no apparent reason.

In general, the infections are caused by a bacterial infection.

Occasionally, they can be due to a fungal or yeast infection

Other possible causes include:

- Swimming, otitis externa is sometimes called swimmer's ear.
- Skin problems. Eczema or psoriasis may affect the ear canal and cause an otitis externa.
- Ear syringing to clear earwax. This may irritate the ear canal and cause inflammation.

### **Symptoms**

The symptoms can be very severe with pain of otitis externa can vary between cases.

Common symptoms include itch, ear discharge, temporary dulled hearing and pain. Your ear may feel blocked or full. One or both ears can be affected.

### **Treatment**

**General advice** – keep your ear dry. Use cotton wool when washing (to waterproof it, apply some Vaseline to the outer part of the cotton wool) and then throw the cotton wool away after it has been in your ear. This prevents re-introducing infection. Try not to leave cotton wool balls in your ear and avoid using cotton wool sticks to clean the canal. These often traumatise the canal.

**Ear drops or sprays** There are a number of options available.

**Cleaning your ear** This is best done with micro suction to remove the bacterial or fungal debris. If the infection has closed up the ear canal then drops will not get in. In these instances a wick can be inserted to hold the canal wall open. This is easily removed after a couple of days.

If the infection is very severe or there is infection in the skin around the ear (cellulitis) then you may need antibiotics.