



Ear Hygiene

Check your dog's ears!

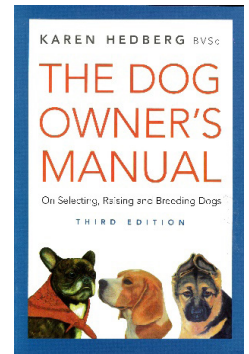
After the sense of smell, a dog's ability to hear is the next most important of its special senses. Dogs' ears have evolved to enhance & sharpen an acute sense of hearing giving them the ability to hear sounds at much higher and lower frequencies than humans.

Grooming is an essential part of caring for your dog. What many dog owners fail to realise is the extent of necessary ear care for dogs. Regardless of the shape of your dog's ears, it's important to establish a weekly ear care routine to prevent ear wax build up, ear mites, and ear infections. Some dogs, especially those with dangling ears, are prone to ear infections. If your dog exhibits signs of ear discomfort, like constant scratching or rubbing, look inside the ear. Symptoms such as redness, swelling, or discharge should raise concern.

Dr Karen Hedberg BVSc reports on routine ear hygiene, ear infections, allergies, flies and mites and how they can affect the ears, as well as treatments.

Routine Ear Hygiene

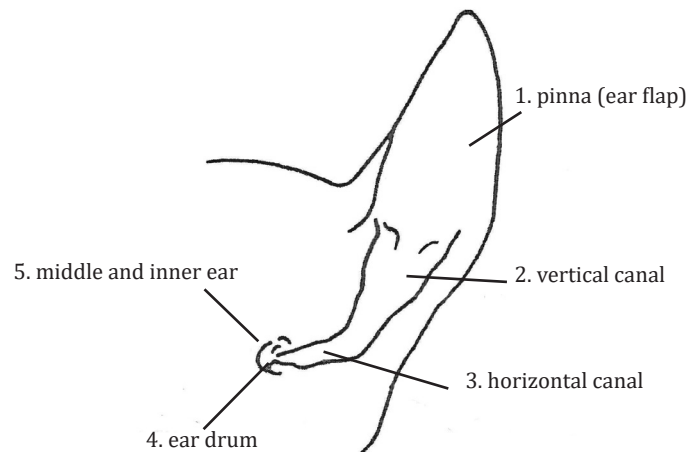
1. Check the ears at least once every two weeks, more often in humid weather.
2. Clean out only as necessary. If you do this too often, you produce excess wax, or dry the ear out too much.
3. When there is an infection, which can be recognised by smell, hanging of the head to one side, or pain when handled near the ears, see your veterinarian immediately and continue any treatment until the ears have returned to normal.
4. When cleaning the ears, wrap a piece of cotton wool around your little finger and use it like a big fat cotton ball. Your little finger can never reach down to the bottom of even larger dogs ear canals. Dogs do not mind big objects in the ears, but they hate small ones, like cotton buds. Massage the bottom of the ear canal from the outside to thoroughly loosen the



Extract from *The Dog Owner's Manual on Selecting and Breeding Dogs* by Dr Karen Hedberg BVSc

wax/infection from the lower section and this will raise the infected material to the top.

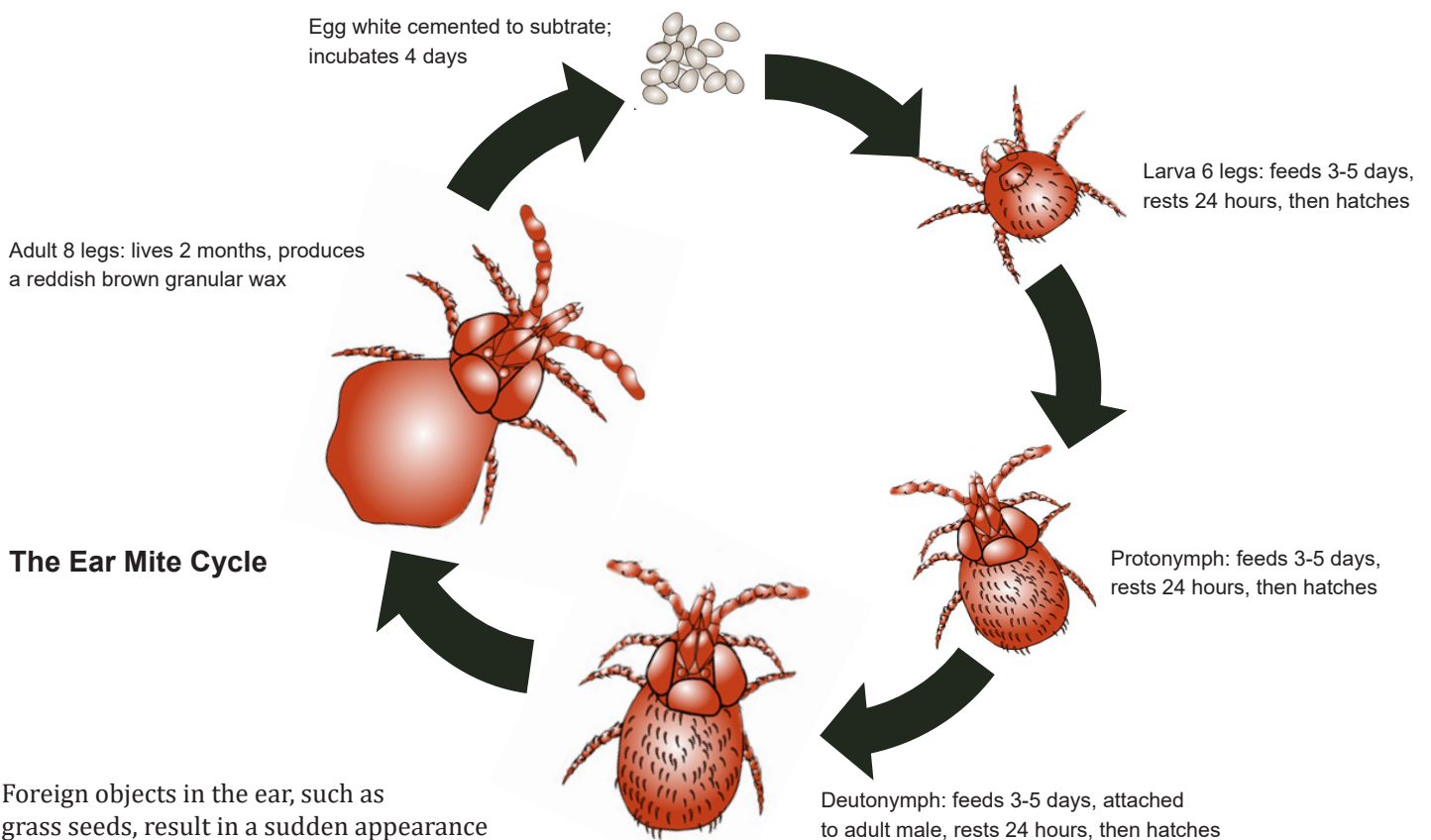
5. Do not dry out the ear excessively. The ear canal is basically a waxy/oily environment and if it gets too dry, new problems are created. Despite checking the ears regularly, some problems can still occur.



Ear Infections

The first sign of an ear infection is apparent when the dog is seen constantly shaking his head, or holding the head to one side. Upon examination, the inside of the ear is seen to be red and inflamed, and there is usually heavy wax or a slimy discharge.

Canker is, by definition, a bad smell. Chronic ear infections are usually accompanied by excessive waxy or purulent discharge, with a memorable smell, unpleasant to the owner and the veterinarian alike. These infections have sometimes been present for several years and the ear canal is often grossly thickened and swollen internally. Once there is permanent damage to the ear canal or the ear drum, radical surgery to open up the side of the ear may (eventually) be necessary. It is most important not to neglect ear infections. Once the condition becomes chronic, the ear takes very little irritation to flare up during suitable conditions of humidity.



Foreign objects in the ear, such as grass seeds, result in a sudden appearance of symptoms, such as shaking the head and holding the affected ear down (particularly in Spring and Autumn). Dogs get very agitated and can become quite distressed. Get veterinary attention as soon as possible (preferably not in the middle of the night).

Ear Mites

Ear mites are mildly contagious and affected dogs are seen more commonly in crowded (dog) living conditions, e.g. kennels.

Symptoms

The picture above is one of irritation of the ears and the presence of a reddish granular wax which, when examined through an otoscope, will reveal lots of little moving objects. They obviously cause intense irritation and misery to the dog: it must be exquisitely itchy to have them trundling around inside one's ear canal! An easy way to see them is to put some wax from the ear on a slide or a piece of glass, and mix a little oil with the wax. You will see the mites wriggling across the top of the oil.

Treatment

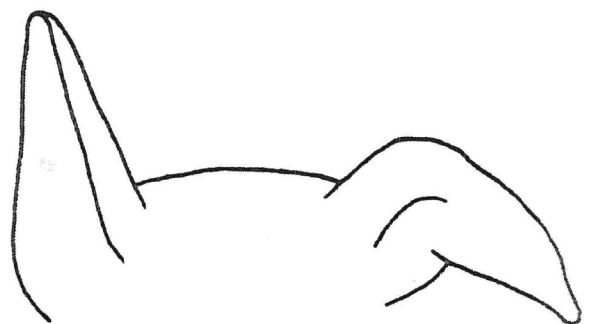
There are various drops available for the treatment of ear mites. It is important to remember that whatever you treat them with, it can take some time to clear. Treat the ears for 7-10 days. It is always a good idea to have your vet re-check the ears several weeks after you've started treatment, to ensure that the infestation has been cleared up completely. Newer treatments include Milbimycin® Ear vials, that specifically treat mites, or by adding a very small

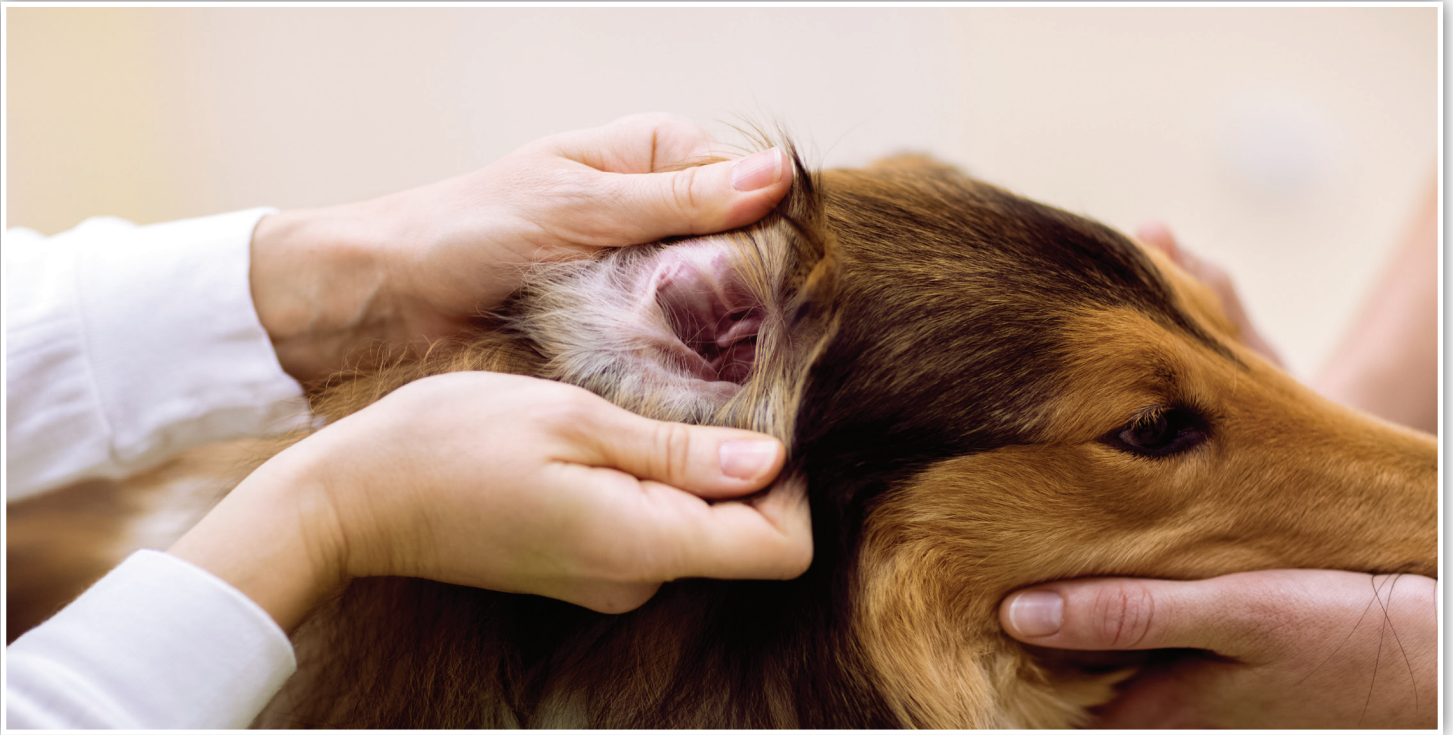
amount of Ivermectin® to normal ear drops to gently increase their efficiency against ear mites.

Ear Haematomas

If there is an ear infection, particularly during hot weather, the chance of getting an ear haematoma is greatly increased. The blood vessels in the ears are fairly delicate, especially in the heat, and vigorous head shaking can cause a rupture of a blood vessel, leading to a haematoma. The affected ear has the appearance of a stuffed sausage, with the fat ear drooping off to the side. Treatment is generally surgical.

When ear haematomas occur in the erect eared dog, it may be the end of the dog's show career, as the scar tissue weighs the ear down and normal characteristic ear carriage may be lost. Once again, remember, it is never wise to neglect an ear infection.





General Treatment of Ear Infections

Treatments can vary tremendously, depending on the cause of the irritation and the severity of the condition. Different veterinarians have their own preferred methods of treatment for ear conditions. Once your dog has had several bouts of ear infections (not including mite infestations), it can become very ear sensitive to humid weather. This is more apparent after a bout of rain or high humidity, generally in spring and autumn when the dog's ear condition will flare up. Be alert for these periods and, with a little care, the ears can be quickly treated and return to normal.

“The message is do not neglect ear infections, or you may pay the price for years afterwards.”

Fly Bites on Ears

Biting flies can cause considerable damage to the tips of erect eared breeds, as well as the upper fold or creases of drop eared breeds. Fly bites are more commonly seen with the short to medium length coat types. If these are neglected, they can eventually cause severe damage to the circulation to the tips of the ears, where the tips become thickened, curled and actual tissue may be lost. Badly affected erect ears may end up losing more than a third of their original length due to this problem.

Symptoms

A heavy crusting of dried blood is found on the upper 1-3cm of the ear in the erect eared dog and along the fold near the head of the drop eared dogs.

Treatment

This type of ear irritation can easily be cleared up and managed. The whole treatment / management revolves around crusting off the dried blood before applying a fly repellent. The smell of the dried blood attracts the flies back to the ear, but do not wash it off, as the smell of the blood just gets spread further. If the blood is removed before applying any treatment, the problem is halfway cured.

Management

Preventing the flies from attacking the ears is a regular maintenance chore. Some individuals are more prone to fly 'strike' than others and will always be prime candidates for repeat attacks. The dogs who are lazy to flick their ears when the fly has landed, are the ones that are repeatedly affected. The type of fly repellent to use is an important consideration. Use a cream or ointment, as the thicker the cover the better, particularly over the damaged skin.

A good homemade fly repellent can be made by mixing oil of citronella with warmed up Vaseline; mix as much oil in as the Vaseline will hold (about 20% citronella). When it cools, it will thicken. The resultant cream/ointment sticks well to the hair. Apply this every morning or evening, depending on when the worst attacks occur, to either side of the ear at the tip and spread a few centimetres below the tip. On the folds, cover the bitten areas by a radius of 1-3cm.

Always remember to remove the dried blood before applying the fly repellent!