



Swimmer's Ear (Otitis Externa)

Patient and Family Education

This teaching sheet contains general information. Please talk with your child's doctor or pediatric audiologist to get more specific information. Call **813-262-1330** to schedule an appointment.

What is swimmer's ear?

Swimmer's ear (otitis externa) is an infection of the skin in the ear canal. This can occur when:

- Water becomes trapped in the ear canal, which allows germs to grow more easily.
- Scratches in the ear canal from Q-tips, paper clips, bobby pins, and pencils become infected.
- Ears become irritated from wearing ear buds and ear plugs.

What are the possible symptoms of swimmer's ear?

Your child may have one or more of these:

- Ear pain, especially with touch or movement
- Itchy ears
- A feeling that the ear is stopped up
- Clear or milky ear drainage
- Swelling or redness of the ear
- Sounds may be muffled

What is the treatment for swimmer's ear?

Some general guidelines to follow include:

- Mix $\frac{1}{2}$ **teaspoon of boric acid powder** and **2 cups of ethyl alcohol**. Put 3-4 drops in the affected ear once per day.
 - Boric acid is a weak acid that is used as an antiseptic. It is also used as an insecticide and is commonly sold as roach powder. You can buy it at most grocery, discount, or home improvement stores.
 - Ethyl alcohol is also known as rubbing alcohol and can be found at any pharmacy.
- Give your child Acetaminophen (Tylenol or less costly store brand) or ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil, or less costly store brand) for fever or pain. Follow the directions on the box carefully or ask your doctor how much medicine to give.
DO NOT:
 - Give your child more than 5 doses of acetaminophen in a 24 hour period.
 - Give acetaminophen to babies younger than 3 months old without talking to your child's doctor.
 - Give ibuprofen to babies younger than 6 months old without talking to your child's doctor.
 - Give acetaminophen and ibuprofen together.
- Avoid swimming until all symptoms are gone or until allowed by the doctor.

How can I help prevent swimmer's ear?

- Do not allow water to get into your child's ears when bathing by using ear plugs.
- If water does get into your child's ears after swimming or bathing, dry the ear canal well with a towel.
 - Then, have your child turn his/her head side-to-side while pulling the ear lobe in different directions.
 - This will help to drain the water out of his/her ear canal.
 - Also, you can use a blow dryer aimed at the side of your child's head near the ear and angle to his/her face for 15 seconds on a cool setting to help dry out any water that is still in the ear.
- Mix equal parts of distilled white vinegar and isopropyl alcohol. Put 2 to 3 drops in each ear after swimming. Ask your doctor about other products you can use.
- If your child has ear tubes, please consult a doctor prior to starting any home treatment program.
- Never place anything inside your child's ear.
 - Do not use Q-tips (cotton swabs) inside your child's ear.
 - Teach your child not to put things in their ears.

When should I call the doctor?

Call your child's doctor if your child:

- Still has ear pain or ear drainage after 24 hours of treatment

- Has a temperature over 100.3 °F
- Has a red area behind his/her ear
- Also, call if you have any concerns about how your child looks or feels