



Aural Haematoma

What is an Aural Haematoma?

Each one of your pet's ear lobes (pinna) is made up of two layers of opposing skin held together with fibrous tissue with nerves and blood vessels running between the two layers. An aural (ear) haematoma is a collection of blood or serum, and sometimes a blood clot within the pinna or ear flap. This blood collects under the skin and causes the ear flap to become thickened. The swelling may involve the entire ear flap or it may involve only a small area.

What causes them to form?

This damage to the blood vessels may be caused by any form of trauma like being hit by a car or bitten by another animal, but it is most likely that your pet actually caused the trauma. Ear infections, mites, inflammation and foreign objects can be very uncomfortable and your pet's first reaction would probably be to shake their head or scratch vigorously at the ear. This 'self-abuse' can very easily damage the fragile blood vessels within the pinna and cause an aural haematoma to form.

How are they treated?

Various differing approaches may be tried in the treatment of aural haematomas. If there is only a mild swelling and there are other complicating factors (like old age or other ongoing disease problems) then your vet may suggest a course of medication and leaving the haematoma to be partially resorbed with time. Alternatively, your vet might decide to drain the fluid out of your pet's pinna and then inject an anti-inflammatory drug into the remaining space to prevent the haematoma from re-forming.

Most cases, however, require surgery. This involves giving your pet a full general anaesthetic, draining the fluid from the pinna and then suturing the two layers of skin together. This approach allows your vet to remove all of the fluid and suturing the two layers together forms a strong fibrous bond between the two and helps to prevent a recurrence.

The second major aspect of treatment is to work out why the haematoma formed in the first place. As mentioned, above, any reason that causes the dog to shake its head can result in the formation of an aural haematoma. Some things which can cause this include:

- Grass seed or other foreign body lodged within the ear canal.

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Drs Jason Wendt BVSc (Hons), Scot Campbell BVSc (Hons) MACVSc DACVN & Associates

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- Ear infection
- Allergies resulting in an itchy ear, scratching and shaking head.
- Fly bites to the tips of the ears
- Immune mediated disease.

Further Treatment?

The sutures will need to be removed 3 weeks after surgery. At this time, a haematoma is usually healed. If an infection is also being treated your veterinarian will also check to make sure that the infection is gone. It is vitally important that the infection is successfully treated to prevent further head shaking which may result in further haematomas.

What if it is left untreated?

If a haematoma is left untreated the blood in the ear flap will separate into serum and a clot and will gradually be absorbed over a period of 10 days to 6 weeks. This is an uncomfortable time for your dog and unfortunately some scarring will take place during this process. It also causes a deformity of the ear flap resulting in a "cauliflower ear" which may cause further problems.

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