For Pain Free Swimming!

There are many of us who love to swim and squash in water, but at the same time we need to deal with the fear of getting water trapped in our ear allowing microorganisms to thrive. That infection or inflammation that swimmers get caused by the remaining water after swimming is called Swimmer's ear.

Swimmer's ear also called oitis externa is an infection which occurs in the visible or outer part of the ear canal. Our ear canal is a cylinder-shaped structure which runs from your eardrum to the outside of our head. When water collects in the ear canal (frequently trapped by wax), the skin can become soggy and can create a moist environment which is conducive for bacterial growth. The swimmer's ear infection is usually caused by excessive water exposure from swimming, diving, surfing, kayaking, or other water sports. Water from a bath or shower can trigger the condition, too, but that happens very rarely. Cuts or scratches in the lining of the ear canal can also predispose to bacterial infection of the ear canal. Males and females of all ages are affected by otitis externa equally, but children and teenagers most frequently develop this type of ear infection. However, competitive swimmers and adults that are frequent swimmers can be disproportionally affected as well.

Symptoms

Swimmer's ear can occur to anyone and the symptoms are usually mild at first. However they may get worse if the infection isn't treated well. The infection are often classified by the doctors according to mild, moderate and advanced stages of progression.

Mild signs and symptoms

- Itching in your ear canal
- Slight redness inside your ear
- Mild discomfort that's made worse by pulling on your outer ear (pinna, or auricle) or pushing on the little "bump" (tragus) in front of your ear
- Some drainage of clear, odorless fluid

Moderate progression

- More intense itching
- Increasing pain
- More extensive redness in your ear
- Excessive fluid drainage
- Discharge of pus
- Feeling of fullness inside your ear and partial blockage of your ear canal by swelling, fluid and debris
- Decreased or muffled hearing

Advanced progression

- Severe pain that may radiate to your face, neck or side of your head
- Complete blockage of your ear canal
- Redness or swelling of your outer ear
- Swelling in the lymph nodes in your neck
- Fever

Don't ignore the infection even if it is mild. Contact your doctor immediately if you have got fever along with the pain. If it is not treated promptly it might lead to temporary hearing loss, long-term infection (chronic otitis externa), Deep tissue infection (cellulitis), Bone and cartilage damage (necrotizing otitis externa) or more widespread infection. For most cases of swimmer's ear, doctors prescribe eardrops, antifungal medication, pain relievers, oral medicines or antibiotic depending on the severity of the infection and pain.

Helping your treatment work

- While you are treating your ears abide by some simple tips to help your treatment work:
- Don't swim or scuba dive.
- Avoid flying.
- Don't wear an earplug, hearing aid or headphones before pain or discharge has stopped.
- Avoid getting water in your ear canal when bathing. Use a cotton ball coated with petroleum jelly to protect your ear during a bath.

Swimmer's Ear Prevention Tips

- Keeping ears as dry as possible: Use a bathing cap, ear plugs while swimming can help you keep water out of your ears.
- Drying your ears after swimming or showering: do dry your ears thoroughly by using a towel or a piece of dry cloth. Dry only your outer ear, wiping it slowly and gently with a soft towel or cloth. Tilting your head to hold each ear facing down or pulling your earlobe in different directions while your ear is faced down can also help water drain out.
- Keeping out foreign objects from your ears: don't use objects like cotton-tip swabs, pencils, paperclips, or fingers in your ear canal.
- Don't remove ear wax: Ear was is essential for our ears as it helps protect your ear canal from infection. Don't try to remove it yourself.
- Don't use random eardrops to the injured ears: You need to consult your doctor before putting any ear drops into your itchy, flaky, swollen, or painful infected ears.

Source: Mayo clinic