

Ear Infections Explained

Family Matters

Few things are more frustrating—for both pets and their families—than an ear infection.

A dog shaking their head constantly.

A cat scratching at one ear.

A painful ear that's sensitive to touch.

Ear infections are one of the most common conditions we see in practice, but they're also one of the most misunderstood.

At Amity, we believe that successfully treating an ear infection means understanding **why it happened**, not simply making it go away. Our purpose is to **Empower You Through Education**, helping you understand your pet's ears and how to keep them healthy.

What Is an Ear Infection?

An ear infection occurs when the normal environment inside the ear becomes unhealthy, allowing bacteria, yeast or sometimes both to multiply.

This causes inflammation, discomfort and often a characteristic smell or discharge.

The infection itself is often **the result**, not the original cause.

What Causes Ear Infections?

There isn't one single cause.

Common underlying causes include:

- Allergies.
- Ear mites.
- Excessive wax production.
- Grass seeds or other foreign bodies.
- Narrow ear canals.
- Polyps or growths.
- Hormonal disease.

Unless the underlying cause is identified and treated, the infection is likely to return.

That's why recurrent ear infections deserve further investigation rather than repeated courses of medication alone.

What Signs Should I Look For?

Common symptoms include:

- Head shaking.
- Scratching at the ears.
- Redness.
- An unpleasant smell.
- Brown, yellow or black discharge.
- Holding the head to one side.
- Pain when the ears are touched.

Some pets become quieter or reluctant to have their head stroked because the ears are simply too painful.

Why Doesn't My Vet Always Look Inside the Ear?

Many people expect the first step to be looking deep into the ear with an otoscope.

At Amity, we don't routinely do this during the initial consultation. The ear is often already extremely sore and inflamed, and inserting a metal otoscope can cause unnecessary discomfort while providing relatively little additional information at this stage.

Instead, we first focus on obtaining information that will directly influence treatment while causing as little discomfort as possible. Once the inflammation has settled, an otoscopic examination can often be performed much more comfortably if further assessment of the ear canal or eardrum is needed.

Why Do You Examine Ear Cells?

One of the most valuable tests we perform is **ear cytology**.

Using a cotton bud, we collect a sample from the ear and examine the cells and organisms under the microscope during your appointment. This allows us to identify whether bacteria, yeast and inflammatory cells are present, helping us choose the most appropriate treatment from the very beginning.

If the infection doesn't improve as expected, or if it keeps returning, we may then take an ear swab for **culture and sensitivity testing**. This laboratory test identifies exactly which bacteria are present and which antibiotics are most likely to be effective, allowing us to tailor treatment for more complicated or resistant infections.

Why Is Follow-Up So Important?

Many pets appear much better after just a few days of treatment.

Unfortunately, the infection may not be completely gone.

Stopping medication too early is one of the commonest reasons ear infections return.

That's why we often recommend a recheck appointment. It allows us to confirm the infection has truly resolved, investigate any underlying causes and adjust treatment if necessary.

Healthy Ears Start With the Right Diagnosis

At Amity, our goal isn't simply to prescribe ear drops.

It's to identify **why** your pet developed an ear infection in the first place.

By diagnosing the underlying cause, treating the infection appropriately and minimising unnecessary discomfort during the examination, we're far more likely to achieve a lasting result.

Healthy ears mean happier pets.

And happier pets mean happier families.

Because they're not just your pet.

They're family.

Family Matters.

If you need more information, book an appointment with an Amity vet. We're here to Empower You Through Education and help you become your pet's greatest advocate.