

Ear Mites

Ear mite (*Otodectes cynotis*) infection is one of the most common health problems. They are most commonly seen in cats and kittens. Kittens are usually infected by their mothers. Ear mites are also the most common ear problem seen in puppies and young adult dogs. They are tiny insects that live in the ear canals. They are highly contagious to cats and dogs, but not to humans. If both ears seem affected, one can usually suspect ear mites.

Ear mites are very prolific and it takes only a few ear mites to produce a severe hypersensitive reaction. The most common sign is intense itching associated with scratching and violent head shaking. This can lead to red, crusted and scabbed ear flaps and subsequent hair loss around the ears. Upon examination of the ear canals, one will see what resembles coffee-grounds; a dry crumbly, dark brown waxy discharge, which may also be associated with a bad odor, due to a secondary bacterial infection.

To confirm ear mite infection, it is best to have an ear swab done by your veterinarian. Using a cotton tip applicator, a small sample of the discharge will be taken and placed on a microscope slide with a small amount of mineral oil. The slide will be examined under a microscope. If the results turn up positive for ear mites, the veterinarian will prescribe appropriate treatment.

Do not attempt treatment until ear mites are confirmed. Other ear ailments can be complicated by ear mite treatments. Once ear mites are confirmed, all dogs and cats within the household should be treated as to prevent further infection and reinfection.

First the ears must be cleaned with a prescribed ear cleaner, such as AloCetic Ear Rinse, to remove excess debris. This is very important. The wax and debris in the ear canal provides shelter for the ear mites and prevents the medications from working properly. After the cleansing of the ears, one must apply the prescribed ear mite medication. There are a variety of treatments, all which require a prescription. One of the most common is Tresaderm, which contains a miticide, an antibiotic and a steroid to relieve itching. Treatment may require several applications over a few weeks. Another product is Acarexx, a one-time treatment, which contains Ivermectin. With any medication, it is important to follow the veterinarians instructions.

During treatment, ear mites may temporarily move from the ear canals to other parts of the animals body, causing itching and scratching. It is recommended to also treat your pet with a topical insecticide such as Advantage or Frontline for cats, Advantage or Frontline for dogs or other veterinarian prescribed flea and tick treatment.