



Prevent Swimmer's Ear This Summer



Gary Coleman
M.D.

Swimmer's ear (or otitis externa) is an infection of the outer ear canal, which carries sounds to the eardrum. It can be caused by many different types of bacteria or fungi, and is more common in those who spend a lot of time in the water.

"Too much moisture in the ear can irritate and break down the skin in the canal, providing a source for bacteria to grow," explained Gary Coleman, M.D., a board certified otolaryngologist affiliated with Salem Regional Medical Center's (SRMC) medical staff and SRMC Ear, Nose and Throat.

"People who swim often are more likely to get swimmer's ear, although other things like showering, high humidity or sweating may trap moisture in the ear canal. In addition, anything that causes a break in the skin of the ear canal can lead to an infection, such as scratching the ear canal, vigorous ear cleaning with cotton swabs, or putting foreign objects into the ear."

Symptoms of swimmer's ear:

- Ear pain that gets worse when the outside of the ear is touched or pulled
- Redness and swelling of the outer ear and ear canal
- Itchiness inside the ear
- Sensation that the ear is blocked or full
- Drainage from the ear
- Decreased hearing

Dr. Coleman recommends seeing a doctor for symptoms of swimmer's ear. "Swimmer's ear can be very painful and, if left untreated, lead to complications," he said. "Treatment may include careful cleaning of the ear canal, antibiotic ear drops and over-the-counter pain relievers."

Tips to prevent swimmer's ear:

- Block water from getting in the ear with a swim cap or earplugs
- Avoid swimming in unclean water
- Let water drain out of ears after water activities
- Dry your ears well with a towel after swimming or bathing
- Never put anything in the ear canal, including cotton swabs
- Don't remove earwax on your own

Gary Coleman, M.D., Otolaryngology, treats patients at SRMC Ear, Nose & Throat; located in the Columbiana Medical Center at 750 East Park Avenue in Columbiana. Appointments with Dr. Coleman can be scheduled by calling 330-892-0442. He is affiliated with Salem Regional Medical Center's medical staff.