

## The Canine Ear Identifying Infections & General Maintenance Tips for a Healthy Ear

By: Mary Lou Gerace

Many Golden Retriever owners will, at some point in their dog's life, be faced with the dreaded "itchy and smelling" ear syndrome. If you see your dog shaking his head excessively and/or scratching at either one or both ears, he (or she!) could have a problem! If detected early, and diagnosed properly, ear infections are easily treated at home. However, if ignored, the easily treated problem can escalate into a more serious problem! Also, keep in mind that because Golden Retrievers have flop-ears, they are more susceptible to infections rather than dogs with erect ears. Dogs with erect ears have the added benefit of their ears getting more "air" to keep them dry!

The three types of ear infections that I am familiar with are:

- Outer ear – This is generally confined to the ear canal area and stops at the ear drum;
- Middle ear – This affects the area of the ear right inside the ear drum;
- Inner ear – This is the area that is closest to the brain and will involve the bones of the inner ear;

Most ear problems (infections) start out in the Outer Ear. The dog will shake his head often, scratch with more intensity, rub his head on the carpet, moan while rubbing his head, and generally show other signs of discomfort. When you lift the earflap, the flap itself will most likely be red and inflamed, as will the outer portion of the ear. You may also notice a brown discharge. The discharge color can range from a light brown to a dark brown. This discharge may have an odor. This type of infection could be either a bacterial or yeast related infection. A diagnosis by a veterinarian is the best route to take if this is the first time you are faced with an outer ear infection. Your vet will most likely dispense ointments or drops and these can be administered at home.

While bacterial and yeast related infections are the most common, other causes of Outer Ear infections may be a result of allergies (including foods), ear mites or foreign bodies in the ear such as plain old dirt, water (if your dog is a swimmer), plant material (if your dog is a roller) and of course, those nasty fleas and ticks! Repeated outer ear infections can become "chronic" if not cared for properly and this will set the wheels in motion for Stage 2—Middle Ear Infections!

Middle Ear Infections are usually a direct result of chronic Outer Ear infections. Chronic Outer Ear infections will weaken the eardrum and thus, the infection moves downward! Tilted heads, balance problems and nausea should give you the first clue you are now dealing with a Middle Ear Infection. This infection is more difficult to diagnose and treatment is more intense. Ointments and drops can't reach the infected area, so oral antibiotics are usually prescribed.

Ears that have been neglected and overly damaged because of chronic untreated infections can often result in hearing loss. Over time, the ear canal thickens, the ear cartilage may turn into bone and thus, the dog may appear to be deaf! Prescribed drops, ointments, nor antibiotics will reverse this condition. Surgery is the "only" option and it is, I have been told, quite painful to the dog!

If after reading this article and checking your dog's ears, you find that they are a pretty pink, debris free, and smell quite fresh....what should you do to keep them that way?

- Keep the ears clean and free of wax and debris build-up. Gently wipe out with a cotton ball moistened with an ear cleaning solution prescribed by your veterinarian or a solution sold specifically