

## Play It By Ear

### Learn tips on ear cleaning for Basset Hounds.

*By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG*

**Q.** We recently got an 18-month-old Basset Hound and I was told their ears are high maintenance. I notice she is scratching at them a lot and shaking her head. Could you tell me how to keep them clean?

**A.** Those adorable floppy ears, a Basset trademark, are indeed high maintenance because they tend to get dirty inside and out. They drag along the floor inside the house and the ground outside, as well as dip into the food dish when she eats dinner. Because they are pendulous, air cannot circulate inside the ear canal so they tend to retain moisture. That dark, warm, moist environment provides an ideal breeding ground for bacterial buildup, often leading to ear infections.

A Basset that is shaking her head or rubbing her ears is experiencing itching and burning from a possible infection so the first thing you should do is take her to the vet. When you look inside those ears, if you see inflamed tissue or a discharge, whether yellow or brown, or smell a foul odor, she most likely has either a fungal or a bacterial infection. At this point, simply cleaning out her ears will not cure the problem. The vet will diagnose the condition and prescribe a topical medication as well as an antibiotic to clear it up.

Preventing future problems requires a two-pronged approach. Routine maintenance is the first step in keeping them clean and healthy. Once or twice a week, gently swab out the dog's ear canal and all its crevices with a cotton ball dipped in an over-the-counter ear-cleaning solution. Most contain alcohol, but I like those with such natural botanicals as eucalyptus oil, yucca, tea tree oil, chamomile, or echinacea.

It helps if you direct a few drops of cleanser into the ear canal itself, gently massage the base of the ear for a few seconds. Be careful not to press the cotton ball too far inside and refrain from using cotton-tipped probes as they can injure the ear. A little honey-colored ear wax is normal and these cleansers will remove it along with any other dirt and debris, restoring the ear's proper pH balance while inhibiting the growth of bacteria and fungi, making the ears smell fresh in the process.

The second remedy concerns your pet's diet. Her ear problems could be exacerbated by a food allergy or yeast infection caused by some of the ingredients in her current food. Such cases often produce skin problems, as well. The ear itself is a continuation of the skin, but it contains more sebaceous glands deep inside its recesses.

Look at the ingredients in your dog's food. Since canines are carnivores their systems are not designed to digest corn, wheat, or soy. Sometimes the protein source itself might be the culprit. Talk to your vet about switching from beef, lamb, or chicken-based food to an alternative source such as salmon, anchovy, duck, or venison.

Infected ears can lead to other complications. All that head shaking can cause bubbles of blood known as hematomas to collect under skin of the ear leather. Sometimes they will shrink and disappear on their own, but often they require lancing, draining, and stitching by the vet.

With their short bowed legs, long back, and one of the best trailing noses of all dogs, Bassets are appealing and humorous companions. Bred by monks in the Middle Ages to hunt in heavy cover, they still love to follow their noses, but have adapted quite happily to the role of beloved family pets.