

Ear Scratching Tells Tale

If your dog scratches his ears, shakes his head, and has a funny smell about his ears, he might have an ear infection.

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Q. How can I tell if my dog has an ear infection? A. Obvious signs of ear infections are scratching at the ear and head shaking. Bad yeast infections also can give the inside of the ear a brownish tinge, and there is a distinctly unpleasant smell. Ears with severe bacterial infections sometimes have pus and also smell of infection. Dogs with big floppy ears are most prone to an infection, but even dogs with upright ears can get them. At the first sign of an ear infection, try this: mix vinegar and water one part to three in a bowl. Use a turkey baster (no, this is not a recipe for Thanksgiving) to suck up some of the solution, and shoot it into your dog's ear. Try to suck back as much as you can. Repeat this three

or four times (good luck with that if you have a dog like mine.) Do this once a week at the most. Vinegar, or acetic acid, is very effective at killing most bacteria that grow in ears. In dogs that are known to have repeated bacterial infections, this treatment can help prevent them from getting started. It will not kill yeast, however. If the head shaking and scratching continue, definitely get into see your vet. In addition to an ear infection, your dog might have a foreign object in his ear, an inner ear infection, or even a skin tumor. Your veterinarian must do a careful ear exam with an otoscope and possibly look at a swab from the ear under a microscope. Once a diagnosis is made, there are effective medications for both bacterial and yeast infections. In either case, the ear must first be cleaned out before the medication is applied. Ear infections are only a problem if they go untreated. They will literally drive dogs crazy and their owners as well. Be on the lookout for early signs, and take immediate action. Then they will not turn into a serious problem.

Best, Jon Geller, DVM

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