

Burst Blood Vessel Caused Dog's Swollen Ear

Aural hematomas in dogs may require surgery.

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Q. My dog's ear has flopped over, and seems to be swollen. Is there anything that can be done to relieve the pressure and pain?

A. It sounds like your dog has an aural hematoma, a swelling of the outside portion of the ear (pinna) that occurs when a blood vessel in the pinna bursts, causing it to fill up with blood. It can be a painful and uncomfortable condition.

Aural hematomas usually result from frequent and vigorous head shaking due to an underlying ear infection. It's important to get any infection under control first before treating the hematoma, or it could reoccur.

The treatment of choice is a surgical drainage of the ear, under sedation. The veterinarian will then sew a rigid mesh splint on both sides of the ear so it does not fill up again. It's a rather involved and costly procedure, and not without complications, such as postoperative bleeding.

About 30 percent of dogs with aural hematomas will respond to medical treatment. The veterinarian will drain the blood from the ear (under light sedation), and inject a steroid medication into the ear. Sometimes a head bandage is used to help prevent another hematoma forming. Although many dogs respond to medical treatment, if the ear fills up with blood again they will need the full surgical treatment.

Remember to have any underlying ear infection addressed by your veterinarian, then discuss medical versus surgical options.