

## Aural haematoma (swollen ear flap)

### Overview

- An aural haematoma is a blood-filled swelling inside the ear flap.
- The swelling is usually soft, hot to touch, and causes the ear to droop.
- Most aural haematomas develop because of an underlying problem such as an ear infection, skin problem or ear mites.
- Fortunately, once the underlying cause has been cured, most aural haematomas are fairly straightforward to treat.
- Always book an appointment with your vet if your dog develops an aural haematoma – never attempt to treat it at home.

### What is/what causes an aural haematoma?

An aural haematoma is a pocket full of blood that develops if a blood vessel bursts inside the earflap. Aural haematomas most commonly develop when a pet repeatedly shakes their head or scratches their ear because of an underlying problem such as an **ear infection**, **ear mites** or **itchy skin**. Aural haematomas occasionally develop after an injury or knock to the ear, but this is much less common.



Figure 1. An aural haematoma forms when a blood vessel bursts in the ear.

### Symptoms

Aural haematomas tend to cause:

- A swollen, droopy earflap (that develops very suddenly)
- Redness, heat and pain
- Head shaking
- Ear scratching
- Head tilt (holding the head to one side)

### Diagnosis

Aural haematomas are usually very obvious and easy to diagnose. However, they are nearly always as a result of another problem so your dog will need a full examination to find out what caused it in the first place.

### Treatment

Your dog is likely to need their ear drained, pain relief, and treatment for the underlying cause.

**Draining the swelling** – your vet will normally advise surgery to open the earflap, remove the blood, and leave a drainage hole to stop it refilling. As long as the underlying cause for the aural haematoma is also addressed, surgery is the best option and will reduce the chances of the aural haematoma reoccurring. Some small, painless aural haematomas can be left to

heal by themselves, but most are painful and need to be drained. Some can be drained with a syringe and needle, but most will reoccur very quickly and will then require surgical intervention.

**Pain relief** – aural haematomas are often very uncomfortable so it's likely that your dog will benefit from pain relief.

**Treatment for the underlying cause** – your vet will also prescribe treatment for what caused your dog's aural haematoma to form in the first place. This could be **antibiotics** for an ear infection, treatment for **ear mites**, or perhaps anti-itch medication for a **skin problem**.

### **Homecare**

A large part of your dog's recovery is the care you give them at home. You will need to:

- Keep their ear clean and protected while it heals – the best way to do this is by using a buster collar (head cone), which should be washed regularly and left on until your dog's ear has completely healed.
- Regularly clean your dog's earflap using warm salty water – be very gentle so not to disturb healing.
- Give all prescribed medication
- Call your vet if you notice any unexpected symptoms. It's normal for an aural haematoma to leak a small amount of blood for a few days after being drained. However, you should call for advice if you are worried that your dog's ear is bleeding more than expected, or is becoming increasingly painful, red or swollen.

### **Outlook**

Your dog should recover within two weeks if their ear heals without complications. However, their exact recovery time will vary depending on what caused their aural haematoma to develop in the first place.