



Stuart Barton, M.D., F.A.C.S.  
Robert N. Gebhart M.D., F.A.C.S.  
Quinten M. VanderWerf M.D., F.A.C.S.  
Syed F. Ahsan M.D., F.A.C.S.  
Christopher Walz, M.D.

## **OTTITIS EXTERNA (“SWIMMER’S EAR”)**

### **INSTRUCTION SHEET**

An infection of the ear canal (Otitis Externa) may be acute, sub-acute or chronic. It may be due to a skin condition (dandruff, exzema), an allergy (to foods, inhalants, fungus, cosmetics, or jewelry), an irritation (from middle ear drainage or use of a hearing aid), nervous tension (scratching of the ear), or swimming. In many cases a combination of these factors exists simultaneously. One problem may complicate or aggravate the other.

Regardless of the underlying cause, moisture and irritation (scratching) are usually responsible for keeping the problem active; both must be eliminated.

Under no circumstances should you allow water to enter the ear canal. When showering or washing the hair, place cotton or lab’s wool in the outer opening of the ear and cover the outside of the material with Vaseline. *No swimming until the doctor permits.*

It is natural to scratch your ear if it itches. Unfortunately, this rubbing or scratching aggravates the skin condition greatly, regardless of the underlying cause. A so-called vicious circle of itch-scratch-itch occurs. Soon the ear opening and outer ear may become very sore. In most cases cleaning the ear with a Q-Tip is only an excuse to scratch it and you must not do this unless your doctor specifically recommends the use of a Q-Tip. Most treatments will be ineffective if you persist in scratching.

### **TREATMENT**

1. Do not allow soap, water or peroxide to enter the ear canal.
2. Do not scratch or otherwise irritate your ear canal.
3. If you wear a hearing aid it is best that you leave it out of the involved ear as much as possible until the inflammation subsides.
4. Your doctor will recommend medication to help the skin condition and decrease the itching. These medications may include ointments, medicated ear drops, alcohol ear drops or vinegar swishes.
5. In certain cases allergy tests and injections may be indicated.