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AURAL HAEMATOMA... What is it? Why does it happen?

An aural haematoma is a build-up of blood between the skin and cartilage of the ear. The blood is unable to drain away and this results in a heavy fluid filled ear which is painful.

This condition is very common in dogs and rare in cats. The most common causes are:

- Excessive scratching of the ear due to infection, inflammation, excess wax or ear mites
- Physical trauma e.g. a fight or a knock
- Certain breeds are more prone depending on the shape of their ear flap

Treatment

The underlying problem must be addressed in order to successfully resolve the haematoma. If there is an infection present or ear mites the vet will prescribe medication to treat this. The pressure and swelling must then be reduced and there are several ways of achieving this:

1) A needle can be inserted into the swelling to drain the fluid. This is quick, cheap and relatively painless. Unfortunately it is quite common for the haematoma to return after draining – this may take a few days but sometimes it can return in just a few hours. Repeat drainage is possible and sometimes will resolve



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the issue but if the haematoma keeps recurring, we will recommend surgery. A recent audit of cases suggested that 80% of cases would be solved with 3 or fewer weekly draining procedures.

2) A small incision with a scalpel blade can be made to allow drainage. This is bigger than the hole made with the needle and so will often drip fluid for a few days. This can be quite messy, but it does allow draining for a few days. Local anaesthetic can be used to do this.

3) Surgery gives the best chance of success but requires a general anaesthetic and is more expensive.

- • Hair is clipped on both sides of the ear flap.
- • The ears are examined fully to help identify the underlying cause of this problem, then cleaned thoroughly.
- • The skin of the ear is cleaned and prepared with surgical solution.
- • An incision is made to allow the blood to drain.
- • This incision is enlarged, and a narrow piece of the skin of the ear is removed.
- • A large number of stitches are placed through the ear flap to ensure both inside and outside are as flat and tight as possible. This helps prevent the ear filling with blood again.
- • Pain relief injections are given before your pet wakes.



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- All patients are fitted with a 'buster collar' to prevent the animal scratching at the wound and damaging the sutures.
- Patients are often hospitalised overnight to enable the nursing staff to closely monitor their recovery.

The stitches will need removing after two weeks and the dog will have to wear a collar at all times until the stitches are removed.

The surgical procedure usually has a highly successful outcome. In a few cases however the problem may recur and require further surgery.

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