

Shield yourself from 'swimmer's ear'

July 8 2017



(HealthDay)—It's high season for the painful infection known as swimmer's ear, but it shouldn't spoil your fun if you plan ahead.

Swimmer's ear often happens when germy [water](#) stays in the ear after a dip in the pool or lake. The leftover water creates an environment that helps bacteria grow.

"Swimming is a significant risk factor, especially in fresh water," said Kara Jones-Schubart, a clinical assistant professor at the Texas A&M College of Nursing. "For most people, [swimmer's ear](#) is a one-time occurrence, but for others, it can take a more chronic form."

The main symptom is redness in the [outer ear](#) along with warmth and pain. Parts of the ear may be tender when touched. The ear can also feel full, itchy and irritated, and it may be harder to hear.

Fortunately, there are several ways to prevent swimmer's ear.

"Ear plugs are extremely beneficial when you go swimming," Jones-Schubart said in a college news release. "There are also some over-the-counter solutions that you can use to help rinse out everything in your ear and break up any blockage."

You can also use a hair dryer to help dry your [ears](#) after a swim, but be careful. Make sure it's on a very low setting to prevent hearing damage.

But taking a swim isn't the only way you might wind up with swimmer's ear, Jones-Schubart added.

"A buildup of wax can cause the infection, and so can cleaning your ears the wrong way and injuring the canal," she said. "Use of cotton-tipped applicators (Q-tips) should be avoided."

Treatment for an infection due to swimmer's ear includes ear drops, most often containing antibiotics. However, swimmer's ear infection isn't the same as the typical ear [infection](#) that commonly occurs among

children, which is known as otitis media, Jones-Schubart noted.

More information: The U.S. National Library of Medicine has more on [swimmer's ear](#).

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Citation: Shield yourself from 'swimmer's ear' (2017, July 8) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-07-shield-swimmer-ear.html>

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