

# Common problems with eyes

Infections in the eyes and ears are common, but expert advice from the pharmacy on how to soothe these conditions at home can help reduce discomfort and concern

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1



2

## 1. Blocked ears

Hearing loss or an itch inside the ear are the most common signs of a blockage in the ear canal, which is usually caused by a build-up of excess earwax.

The ear produces wax to lubricate and clean the ear canal and to prevent bacteria and excess water entering the inner ear. Earwax tends to harden and build up as we age. The ear naturally expels wax but occasionally earwax can be over-produced or not effectively excreted, resulting in a blockage.

Excess earwax can be alleviated at home using ear drops containing olive or almond oil. These products soften the wax, making it easier for the ear to excrete it naturally. Patients who require professional syringing are advised to use oil-based ear drops to soften earwax prior to syringing.

It is important to remember that some of these oil-based drops contain peanut oil and can trigger a severe reaction in those with a peanut allergy. Ear drops should not be used on broken or infected skin.

A customer suffering from blocked ears

following a head cold is likely to have an ear infection. Ear infections are common and usually clear up on their own after three days. However, if the customer has a high fever, bleeding, discharge or has been vomiting, they should see their GP.

If a customer thinks a foreign body is the cause of a blockage, the key advice is not to attempt to remove it themselves. If the ear hasn't expelled the item after 24 hours, the patient should visit their GP.

## 2. Swimmer's ear

Swimmer's ear, also known as otitis externa, is an infection of the outer ear and ear canal. It is common among regular water sports enthusiasts who spend prolonged amounts of time in water.

A continued exposure to water weakens the delicate lining of the ear canal, causing it to split and leaving it susceptible to bacterial and fungal infections. Eczema, a foreign body entering the ear canal and using cotton buds to clean inside the ear can also cause the ear canal lining to crack.

Symptoms of swimmer's ear often

begin with irritation inside the ear as the skin becomes inflamed. Other symptoms can include earache, tenderness, a high temperature, headache, a general feeling of being unwell, discharge from the ear and loss of hearing.

Swimmer's ear will usually clear up on its own after three days, though sufferers may experience slight hearing loss and discomfort for a few weeks.

The infection can be treated with antibiotic ear drops and symptoms should subside after seven to 10 days. Occasionally steroid creams are used to help reduce swelling.

Swimmer's ear can be prevented by tilting the head after swimming to allow fluid to escape the ear canal. It is also a good idea to towel dry the external ear to help prevent water from entering the ear.

## 3. Glue ear

Glue ear, or otitis media, is very prevalent among children, although it can affect people of any age. The condition occurs when the space in the middle ear becomes

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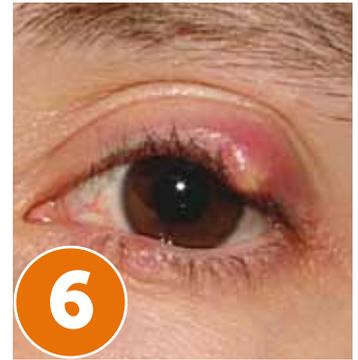
In this article you will:

- Learn the causes of common eye and ear problems
- Find out how quickly these conditions should clear up and which products might help
- Learn when to refer a customer to their GP.



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# & ears



filled with a sticky, glue-like fluid due to a bacterial infection. The fluid dampens sound vibrations as they travel through the eardrum, resulting in hearing loss and sometimes balance problems.

Sufferers may have earache, changes in hearing ability and a feeling of pressure in the ear. Symptoms in young children include a high temperature, vomiting and lack of appetite.

The main advice is to leave the infection for up to three days to clear up by itself. Paracetamol can be used to alleviate pain and to reduce any changes in body temperature. If symptoms persist, or body temperature continues to increase after taking paracetamol, the customer should visit a GP.

Children can often suffer from recurrent infections of the middle ear, where the infection returns immediately after the last bout. This is known as chronic otitis media and typically occurs after a head cold.

Recurrent infections can be treated by inserting grommets (small tubes) into the ears to keep the ear canal open, allowing the infection to drain out more easily. Occasionally, untreated infections can result in perforation of the eardrum due to inflammation or a build up of fluid within the ear.

## 4. Dry eyes

Eyes can become dry, red and sore for a number of reasons. Infective conjunctivitis, also known as pink eye, is an inflammation of the mucous membrane that lines the inner eyelids. It can be caused by a bacterial or viral infection.

Symptoms include redness and a sticky

discharge in one or both eyes. The condition usually clears without treatment within one to two weeks, although lubricant eye drops may help to reduce discomfort. A doctor may prescribe an antibiotic eye drop for cases that do not clear up on their own.

Allergic conjunctivitis is where the conjunctiva has become inflamed due to an allergen such as pollen or dust mites. Both eyes become red, itchy, watery and swollen. Allergic conjunctivitis can be treated with antihistamine eye drops.

Eyes commonly become red and sore without an infection or an allergy present. In this case they are normally irritated by environmental factors. Dusty or smoky atmospheres, chlorine in swimming pools, air conditioning and heating can all cause minor redness and dry eyes.

Computer use and close reading also cause blood vessels to enlarge, making the eyes sore and red. Lubricant eye drops and cooling sprays can soothe irritation and reduce redness.

## 5. Styes

A stye is a small lump on the edge of the eyelid that develops when the sebaceous glands become infected. A stye usually appears as a small red, inflamed area that continues to grow until a small, painful lump forms.

The infection is usually caused by the staphylococcal bacteria, which are more commonly found inside the nose. These germs can be easily transferred to the eyes by wiping the nose and then rubbing the eyes.

Most styes clear up on their own and it is advisable to drink plenty of water and eat

lots of fresh fruit and vegetables to help them to heal.

Cleansing the eye regularly using a clean flannel soaked in warm water will help to draw out pus and fluids that build up.

It is often not necessary to visit a doctor unless symptoms persist or the condition frequently recurs. A doctor may prescribe an antibiotic eye ointment that can be applied at home.

It is crucial that patients do not try to burst the stye as this can be very painful and can cause further infections to develop.

Styes can be prevented by washing hands frequently, especially during a head cold, and before inserting and removing contact lenses and applying eye make-up. ▶

## ! Key points

- Ear infections usually clear up on their own after three days.
- The use of cotton buds to clean inside the ear can damage the ear canal lining, leaving it vulnerable to infection.
- Tilting the head after swimming allows fluid to escape the ear canal, preventing swimmer's ear.
- Never advise a customer to pop a stye or a chalazion on the eyelid as it can lead to infection.
- Remind customers to practise good hand hygiene when inserting and removing contact lenses and applying eye make-up.

## 6. Chalazion

A chalazion is a cyst on the eyelid that starts off as a slight irritation and develops into a painful lump. A chalazion usually affects the upper eyelid and is generally no larger than a small pea. It can take several weeks to develop fully.

The lump is caused by inflammation due to a blocked sweat gland duct in the eyelid. A build up of oil causes the gland to swell, forming a hard cyst and leaving the surrounding skin taut, red and painful.

Chalazion are common and non-serious,

and treatment can often be given at home. Gently massaging the affected area early on will help to encourage drainage of the fluid before it builds up.

Applying a clean, warm flannel to the area for 15 minutes, three times a day, will ease inflammation and help the gland to drain.

It is important to advise the customer not to try to pop the cyst as this can cause infection.

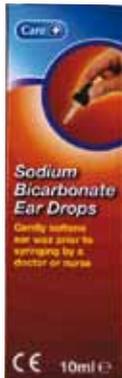
Symptoms often subside within a few days. If the cyst has not drained itself after a month, or it has popped and become infected, it is essential to visit a GP.



## Evaluation

- Familiarise yourself with the most common types of eye and ear infections and their symptoms.
- Learn which medicines your pharmacy stocks that could alleviate discomfort for sufferers.
- Check which products contain peanut oil.

## Related products



### Care for your ears

The Care range includes a number of products to help customers who have ear problems.

Care Olive Oil Eardrops have been launched in response to customer demand for a more convenient form of olive oil with which to treat earwax. They are available on prescription.

The brand also offers Care Sodium Bicarbonate Eardrops, which can be used to gently soften earwax prior to undergoing professional syringing by a doctor or nurse.

**Thornton & Ross**  
**01484 842217**  
**www.care-medicines.co.uk**



### Otex fights earwax

Dendron, maker of Otex Ear Drops, has found that first-time sufferers from excessive earwax often contact their GP but self-treat for subsequent problems.

The company has also found that the majority of Otex users are men but that most purchasers are women. Research also showed that many earwax sufferers have attempted to remove it, using items including pens and paper clips.

Otex Ear Drops use the dual action Otex Formula, which is clinically proven to reduce the need for syringing and contains urea hydrogen that reacts slowly with the moisture in earwax, softening it and breaking it up into flakes.

**Dendron**  
**01923 205706**



### Golden Eye for minor eye infections

Golden Eye Drops and Ointments have been popular for many years as a treatment to provide effective relief from minor eye infections such as conjunctivitis, blepharitis and styes.

The range, available without a prescription, includes Golden Eye Standard Ointment and Drops, which has no age restrictions, and Golden Eye Antibiotic Eye Ointment and Drops for sufferers aged two or above.

Eye-catching point of sale material is available from Dendron representatives.

**Dendron, 01923 205725**

### Ear ear, calm down

EarCalm Spray is the only branded OTC product that treats infections of the outer ear, such as otitis externa or swimmer's ear. It can be used by recurrent sufferers for early self-medication, reducing unnecessary visits to the GP.

EarCalm's active ingredient is acetic acid (2 per cent), which acts to restore normal acidity levels in the ear. The spray mechanism ensures better coverage than drop-based products.

The range has recently been given a new pack design to achieve better standout. It is available for adults and children of 12 and over at a RSP of £6.45 for 5ml.

**Ceuta Healthcare**  
**01202 780558**

