

Aural Hematoma

BASIC INFORMATION

Description

An aural hematoma is the accumulation of fluid or blood within the ear flap (pinna).

Causes

An aural hematoma occurs when scratching the ear or shaking the head causes a blood vessel in the ear to rupture and blood leaks into the tissues of the pinna. Occasionally, hematomas also arise from trauma and bite wounds.

Clinical Signs

A noticeable swelling is present in the pinna that may be either firm or soft. The swelling may be small, or it may involve the entire pinna and extend into the ear canal. Aural hematomas occur most often in dogs but can also occur in cats.

Diagnostic Tests

An aural hematoma can often be diagnosed from the typical clinical appearance. In some instances, the swelling may be aspirated with a needle to obtain cells that can be examined under the microscope.

Your veterinarian may recommend other tests to investigate an underlying cause of the hematoma, such as an external ear infection.

TREATMENT AND FOLLOW-UP

Treatment Options

Aspiration of the fluid can be attempted. This is the simplest and most conservative method of treatment. It is effective in relieving any associated pain, but recurrence of the aural hematoma is very common following aspiration.

Surgical drainage of the fluid also decreases pain, and there is less likelihood of a recurrence. Several surgical methods are available, including the following:

- **Silastic drain placement:** A drain is inserted into the top and the bottom of the hematoma to allow blood to drain from the hematoma.



- **Teat cannula placement:** A teat cannula is a small tube with holes at both ends that can be inserted into the opening of the nipple on the udder of a cow. In this instance, the tube is inserted into the bottom part of the hematoma to allow drainage.
- **Closed suction catheter system:** A catheter is inserted into the bottom of the hematoma. One end of the catheter is attached to a container that collects drainage from the hematoma.
- **Incisional drainage: (most common treatment)** An incision is made from the top to the bottom of the hematoma, and stitches are placed on either side of the incision, all the way through both sides of the pinna.
- **Laser procedure:** A laser is used to make multiple circular skin incisions that allow the hematoma to drain.

Any ear infection that is present is treated with appropriate topical medications. If underlying allergic disease is present, such as atopic dermatitis or adverse food reactions (food allergy), these diseases also must be controlled to prevent head shaking and scratching. Flushing the ear is sometimes done prior to surgery when heavy infection and/or debris are present.

Follow-up Care

Sutures are removed in 14-21 days, whereas drains are usually removed in 3-4 weeks. An Elizabethan collar may be used to prevent premature removal of the sutures or drains. Controlling the underlying disease (i.e. allergies) is the key to preventing future issues.

Prognosis

Most hematomas resolve without complications after surgical drainage. Some hematomas recur; however, even with surgical drainage. Although it is uncommon, disfigurement of the pinna can occur after surgical drainage, and it is more noticeable in animals with erect ears. Pinnal scarring and disfigurement are more common with untreated hematomas!