

Is Your Dog's Ear Swollen? Discover How to Soothe It Fast

If you notice your dog's ear is swollen and bloody, it may be this. Don't panic — it's often manageable. Here are some remedies to help provide relief.

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Ear hematomas in dogs occur when blood accumulates between the skin and cartilage of the ear flap, causing swelling and discomfort. They're often caused by trauma from scratching or head-shaking
- Common causes of ear hematomas include allergies, ear infections, ear mites and trauma to the ear. Floppy-eared breeds and dogs with ear problems are more susceptible to this condition
- Symptoms include swelling, changes in ear position, discomfort, head shaking, scratching, warmth, discoloration and behavioral changes. Early intervention is essential to prevent complications and reduce discomfort
- Treatment options range from surgery to drain fluid and suture the ear flap, to non-surgical methods like warm compresses, compression wraps and herbal remedies
- Medicinal leeching is a less invasive alternative treatment that can draw out blood, reduce swelling and promote healing through the anticoagulant, anti-inflammatory and antibiotic properties of leech saliva

As a dog owner, you may one day notice that your furry friend's ear appears swollen or even bloody. While this can be alarming, there's no need to panic — it could be a condition known as an ear hematoma. With the right care and attention, this condition is manageable and treatable. By familiarizing yourself with its causes, symptoms and treatment options, you'll be better equipped to provide prompt and effective care for your canine companion.

What Is Ear Hematoma?

An ear hematoma, also known as an aural hematoma, occurs when damaged blood vessels cause fluid — containing blood and sometimes pus — to accumulate in the space between the skin and cartilage of a dog's ear flap. This accumulation leads to swelling, which can alter the ear's shape and position, causing it to droop or stick out at an unusual angle.¹

When you touch the ear, it may feel thick or spongy, resembling a water balloon. An ear hematoma can cause significant discomfort for your dog, and if left untreated, it may lead to long-term complications, such as "cauliflower ear," a permanent deformation resulting from scarring.²

Common Causes of Ear Hematomas

Ear hematomas in dogs are primarily caused by trauma to the ear flap, often stemming from excessive scratching or vigorous head shaking. These behaviors are commonly triggered by underlying issues such as:^{3,4,5}

1. **Allergies** — Dogs may scratch their ears excessively due to allergic reactions to food, pollen or environmental irritants.
2. **Ear infections** — Bacterial or yeast infections in the ear can cause discomfort, prompting your dog to shake their head or scratch at their ears, which can damage blood vessels.
3. **Ear mites** — These tiny parasites can irritate the ear canal, causing dogs to scratch and shake their heads vigorously, resulting in trauma to the ear flap.
4. **Other trauma** — Minor injuries, such as a bump, bite wound or scratch, can trigger ear hematomas, especially if your dog continues to agitate the area.

Some dogs are more predisposed to developing ear hematomas, particularly those with a history of ear problems or blood clotting disorders. Floppy-eared breeds, such as Cocker Spaniels or Basset Hounds, are also at a higher risk because their ear structure makes them more vulnerable to injury.^{6,7}

Understanding these causes is essential because treating the underlying issue is often as important as addressing the hematoma itself. For instance, if your dog develops a hematoma due to an ear infection, treating only the hematoma without addressing the infection will likely lead to recurrence.

Recognizing the Symptoms of Ear Hematoma

Recognizing the symptoms of an ear hematoma is important for early intervention, reducing your dog's discomfort and the risk of long-term complications. Here are the key symptoms to watch for:

- Swelling
- Changes in ear position
- Discomfort or pain
- Head shaking
- Scratching the affected ear
- Warm to touch
- Discoloration
- Behavioral changes
- Blood-tinged discharge
- Head tilting

If you notice any of these symptoms, it's important to monitor your dog closely. While some ear hematomas can resolve on their own, large or painful hematomas may require veterinary intervention to prevent complications or infections. If the swelling is large enough to cover their ear canal, seek immediate veterinary care.

When you take your dog to the vet, they will perform a physical examination and may recommend additional tests to determine the underlying cause of the hematoma. Treatment often involves surgical intervention, especially for larger or more persistent cases. The procedure typically involves draining the accumulated blood and suturing the ear flap to prevent fluid from reaccumulating.⁸

How to Treat Ear Hematoma Without Surgery

For less severe cases, you might be able to manage your dog's ear hematoma at home, without the need for surgery. Applying a warm compress to the affected area can help reduce swelling and provide relief. Simply soak a clean cloth in warm water, wring it out and gently place it on your dog's ear for several minutes; do this several times a day.⁹

You can also use a snug compression wrap to keep the ear securely pressed against their head. This helps minimize movement and prevents further irritation or trauma. Make sure the wrap is comfortable and not too tight, as discomfort can lead to additional stress for your dog.¹⁰

Herbal and homeopathic treatments can also offer natural anti-inflammatory and healing support. Some herbal remedies you can use include:¹¹

1. **Yunnan baiyao** — This traditional Chinese herbal remedy helps stop bleeding and support tissue healing. It can be given orally or applied directly to the affected area.
2. **Yarrow** — When applied topically, yarrow can help strengthen capillary walls and minimize swelling.
3. **Witch hazel** — This has natural astringent properties that can help constrict blood vessels and reduce inflammation. It can be gently applied to the affected area with a cotton ball.
4. **Arnica montana** — This homeopathic remedy has been shown to reduce swelling and bruising, and can help alleviate pain associated with the condition.
5. **Hamamelis** — Derived from witch hazel, this remedy is particularly useful for supporting vein health and helping soothe the affected area while promoting healing.

Consult an integrative veterinarian before starting any herbal or homeopathic treatment to ensure proper dosage and application. They can help determine the most appropriate remedy based on your dog's specific symptoms and overall health condition.

Remember — while these home treatments can provide relief and support healing, it's wise to seek professional veterinary care if the hematoma doesn't show signs of improvement within a few days or if your dog appears to be in significant pain.

Check the ear for signs of infection, such as foul odor, discharge or increased redness. Also, don't attempt to drain the hematoma at home, as this can lead to infections and other complications.¹²

Medicinal Leeching — A Less Invasive and Painless Treatment Option

While it might sound like a practice from centuries past, medicinal leeching is an alternative treatment that has been explored in veterinary medicine for vascular and blood-borne conditions like ear hematomas. Leech therapy is a minimally invasive treatment with little to no pain, thanks to the anesthetic properties in leech saliva.¹³

During feeding, a leech can draw about 1 to 2 teaspoons of blood, and the area may continue to ooze the same amount for up to 48 hours after the leech detaches. Once the leech attaches to the skin, it releases saliva containing substances that thin the blood and prevent clotting.

As it feeds, it mainly consumes venous blood, helping to alleviate congestion. The saliva also offers multiple benefits, including anticoagulant, anti-inflammatory and antibiotic effects. It enhances blood flow to the area and provides pain relief and vasodilation, which promote healing.

The process begins with a trained professional carefully applying sterilized leeches to the swollen ear, allowing them to attach and start feeding. After the leeches feed, they fall off by themselves. Removing them prematurely is not a good idea, as it reduces the therapeutic effect. No additional wound care is needed after the leech detaches. The continued oozing of 1 to 2 teaspoons of blood after the leech falls off helps cleanse the area. Once the bleeding stops, the wound quickly closes and forms a protective scab.

Most animals respond well to leech therapy, and dogs can typically move around during the treatment. However, close supervision is necessary to prevent them from scratching or rubbing the treated area. It's also important to ensure they don't lie on the ear being treated while the leeches are attached.

Sources and References

^{1,3} [VCA Animal Hospitals, Hematoma of the Ear in Dogs](#)

^{2,4,6,10} [Dogleggs, September 10, 2024](#)

^{5,7,11,12} [Dogs Naturally, September 23, 2024](#)

⁸ [Can Vet J. 2020 Mar; 61\(3\): 313–315](#)

⁹ [Beyond Pets Animal Hospital, March 2, 2023](#)

¹³ [Whole Dog Journal, January 10, 2019](#)
