

AURAL HAEMATOMA

What is a haematoma of the ear, and how does it occur?

An aural (ear) haematoma is a collection of blood or serum, and sometimes a blood clot within the pinna or ear flap. This blood collects under the skin and causes the ear flap to become thickened. The swelling may involve the entire ear flap or it may involve only one area. Aural haematomas usually occur as a result of local irritation to some part of the ear. When something irritates the ear canal, the dog responds by scratching or shaking the head. Excessive shaking causes blood vessels to break, resulting in bleeding. An understanding of the ear's anatomy makes the sequence of events more logical. The ear flap is composed of a layer of skin on each side of a layer of cartilage. The cartilage gives the ear flap its shape. Blood vessels go from side-to-side by passing through the cartilage. Violent shaking causes the vessels to break as the skin slides across the cartilage.

How is it treated?

There are four steps in treatment.

1. The blood is removed from the pinna. This is accomplished by making multiple small incisions over the haematoma.
2. The space where the blood accumulated is obliterated. Since the skin over the haematoma has been pushed away from the cartilage, it must be reattached to it to prevent another haematoma from occurring. This is accomplished by a series of sutures that are passed through the ear flap.
3. The pinna is stabilised to prevent further damage. The pinna is laid on top of the dog's head and bandaged in place. Although the bandage may be somewhat cumbersome, it will prevent further damage to the pinna and allow proper healing to progress.
4. The cause of the problem is diagnosed and treated. On some occasions the fluid may be drained and the haematoma injected without incision. Another important aspect of treatment is dealing with the cause of the shaking. If an infection is present, medication is dispensed to treat it. However, some dogs have no infection but have foreign material (a tick, piece of grass, etc.) lodged in the ear canal. If so, the foreign material is removed. It is also possible that a foreign body initiated the shaking but was later dislodged. If that occurs, and no infection is present, further treatment of the ear canal is not needed.

Will I need to bring my dog back for further treatment?

The bandage and sutures are generally removed in about 7-10 days. At that time, the haematoma is usually healed. If discharge occurs from the holes before they close, it should be cleaned off with an antiseptic solution. If an infection was present, it will be necessary to recheck the ear canal to be sure that the infection is gone. Otherwise, another haematoma may occur.