**Taking care of your pet’s ears**

Take the time to look in your pet’s [ears](http://www.examiner.com/topic/ears/articles). A tiny amount of clear to yellowish wax is normal, if you use a tissue to gently wipe them out. Brown or black gunk is not normal and usually indicates yeast, an allergy, or sometimes [ear mites](http://www.examiner.com/topic/ear-mites/articles). If the skin is red, bleeding or swollen, get them treated immediately. White, yellow, green or brown pus is cause for immediate concern and treatment.

In general, ears do not like having watery cleaners put into them. Unless there is an infection that needs to be treated, avoid adding liquids into the ear canals. If after swimming you want to make sure there is no residual water, use a safe pet product that is “drying,” so that it does not leave wetness in the ears. Moisture can cause yeast and bacteria to grow, the skin can get irritated, and the pet will likely shake their head a lot. If a pet shakes their head too much, blood blisters can form in the ear flaps, often requiring surgery.

A note of caution regarding some over the counter products for pets’ ears: Avoid essential oils that are warming such as clove oil or cinnamon. These can be extremely caustic to the ears, even if they smell nice. There are natural enzymatic ear treatments available from natural vets that do not require flushing first, since they degrade build-up in the ear, while soothing at the same time.

If you need to wipe out excess wax, grime or dirt, use a tissue wrapped over your finger while gently stabilizing the muzzle or the head. This will help the pet to not shake their head when the ear gets tickled. If you must use a cotton swab, hold onto it well--near the tip--so you are not tempted to insert it too far. Again, holding the head steady is ideal. The ear canals are shaped like the letter “L.” As long as you can see the end of the cotton swab and you are being gentle, you are not likely to cause harm. However, if there is copious hard wax you could potentially push it deeper. When in doubt, or if there is a lot of material to clean out, best to let the vet help.