



# Central West Specialists

## Ear, Nose & Throat Specialist

### **Tropical Ear**

“Tropical Ear” as it is known all over the world, is an infection of the ear canal skin, and sometimes the underlying cartilage and bone, pre-disposed to by water warmth and humidity.

There are two main types of infection:

1. A painless clogging of the ear canal which is usually due to a super infection by fungi. These may be white (thrush or candida albicans) or black or grey (aspergillus). Fungal infections are usually predisposed to by the use of antibiotics, either in tablet or in drop form, to the ear canal. The condition can usually be treated by cleaning the ear and using some anti-fungal cream or drops or Gentian Violet.
2. The commonest infection is due to an organism known as “pseudomonas”. This is an opportunistic invader and is a bacteria found in polluted waters and will give a very severe painful swelling of the ear canal or the ear itself, often following water in the ear, or self injury from abrading the ear canal by cleaning with cotton buds, towels or fingers. Minor abrasions of the skin caused by any form of trauma, in the right condition, will allow the bacteria to enter the soft tissue. Antibiotics by mouth should not be given for this condition, except a special authority antibiotic known as “Ciproxin”. Local and gentle cleansing of debris from the ear canal, and Sofradex eardrops are of benefit; the insertion of a special dressing with antibacterial cream, and occasionally intravenous antibiotics are necessary to resolve the infection, which may take up to a week.

Diabetics and patients with eczema-dermatitis of their skin are more likely to develop an infection, as are tourists from warm climates such as Bali. Surfers may also be prone to infection because of narrowing of the ear canal by bony lumps (exostoses) due to prolonged immersion in cold water.

### **Prevention:**

1. Do not touch ear canals. Wax is protective and should be allowed to build up within the ear.
2. Keep water out of the ear.
3. If water enters, then pulling the ear back and tipping the head to drain the water out of the ear canal should be used.
4. Ear plugs are useful particularly for people who swim frequently.
5. Regular use of two parts methylated spirits with one part vinegar; aqua ear or clean ear (contains Tea Tree Oil) are helpful in keeping conditions right within the ear canal which prevents bacterial multiplication.

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6. The occasional use of a clear eardrop such as Locacoten-Vioform, is useful for those patients with wax retention or eczema. If the wax builds up use olive oil each night for a week, and if the ear is syringed, by your local doctor always ask for antibiotic drops for use after syringing.