Aural Hematoma in Pets

What is an Aural Hematoma?

An aural hematoma is a collection of blood between the skin and cartilage of the ear flap. It typically appears as a soft, swollen area on the ear, and is often painful for your pet. This condition is more common in dogs but can also occur in cats.

Causes of Aural Hematoma

Aural hematomas are usually caused by trauma or injury to the ear. This can happen when a pet vigorously shakes its head or scratches due to underlying ear problems such as:

- Ear infections (otitis externa)
- Ear mites
- Allergies The trauma causes small blood vessels within the ear flap to rupture, leading to the accumulation of blood in the space between the skin and cartilage of the ear.

Why is Treatment Important?

Without treatment, the blood clot can turn into thickened scar tissue, leading to permanent changes in the shape of the ear (often called "cauliflower ear"). This can be uncomfortable for your pet and lead to chronic ear problems.

Treatment Options

There are several ways to treat an aural hematoma, depending on its size and severity, as well as your pet's overall health. The goal of treatment is to drain the blood, relieve pressure, and prevent the hematoma from returning.

1.Vacuum Drainage

-A small vacuum drainage system can be placed on the ear to continuously remove the blood and fluid. This method has a good success rate with haematomas at early stages of development and offers excellent cosmetic results.

2.Aspiration and Medication

-In some cases, the hematoma can be drained with a needle (aspiration), followed by flushing the area with saline and injecting a corticosteroid like dexamethasone. Oral steroids may also be prescribed to reduce inflammation and prevent the hematoma from re-filling.

-This method is less invasive and works in around 90% of cases.

3.Surgery

-Surgery is often recommended for larger or persistent hematomas. The procedure involves making an incision to drain the blood and then suturing the ear to promote healing. Sometimes, gauze or special drains are placed under the sutures to prevent the hematoma from reforming.

-Another option is using a CO2 laser (specialised equipment) to create small holes in the ear, allowing fluid to drain without the need for stitches.

4.Cat-Specific Care

-In cats, hematomas are often left untreated for 5-6 days to allow coagulation.

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Post-Treatment Care

After the hematoma is drained or surgically removed, your pet will need some extra care at home to ensure proper healing:

- Bandaging: The ear may need to be bandaged to protect it and reduce swelling.
- E-Collar: Your pet might need to wear an e-collar (cone) to prevent scratching or head-shaking that could cause further injury.
- Follow-up Appointments: Regular vet visits are important to monitor healing and make sure the hematoma doesn't return.
- Addressing the Underlying Cause: It's crucial to treat any underlying ear problems, such as infections or allergies, to prevent another hematoma from forming.

Complications to Watch For

Most pets recover well from aural hematoma treatment, but there are some possible complications:

- Recurrence: Even after treatment, a hematoma can recur, especially if the underlying cause isn't addressed.
- Infection: There's a small risk of infection at the surgical site, which can be managed with antibiotics if needed.
- Ear Deformity: If the hematoma isn't treated, or in severe cases, the ear may develop permanent thickening or deformity.

Complications to Watch For

Aural hematomas are uncomfortable for pets and can lead to long-term issues if not treated promptly. With appropriate care, most pets recover well, and your vet will help you decide the best treatment option based on your pet's specific needs. Treating the underlying ear problem is also essential to prevent future hematomas.

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