

Itchy Ears – Sometimes called “Swimmer's Ears”.

Many people suffer from **itchy, swollen and/or painful** ears (and almost none of them are actually swimmers). There are **3 main causes** of itchy ears:

1. The ears are **too wet** – during a bath, shower, hot tub, pool, lake or ocean.
2. The ears are **too dry (like with Eczema) or ***too “clean” *****– if you are removing too much “wax” from your canal. **Wax is actually a soap your ear makes to protect you!**
3. The ears are **infected** – bacteria, viruses and fungus and molds love ear holes because they are moist, dark and safe. (Especially if you take out all the wax.)

Ironically, all 3 of these problems are **made much worse with Q-tips, fingers**, hair pins or whatever other tool you have been using to make the itch feel better. That is because **your ear canal skin is very fragile** (especially deeper) and even the cotton of a **Q-tip will act like sandpaper** resulting in more irritation, damage, inflammation and therefore **more itchiness!** So sticking fingers, Q-tips or towels in there (like after a shower) you end up **“adding fuel to the fire”** and your ears end up being itchy for **weeks, months even years.**

As if that was not enough, the tiny organisms that **normally live in harmony** inside the ear canal (and don't bother you) begin to take advantage of the injured tissue and use it as a food source. Some bacteria even make **“itchy toxins”** which cause the release of **histamine**, one of the itchiest molecules we make.

So **how do we treat itchy ears?** The most important thing is to have your ears looked at by a Specialist (the reason why you are here.) Although rare, there are **a few dangerous conditions** that need to be ruled out such as **slow growing tumors, aggressive infections (more common in people with Diabetes) and foreign objects (pieces of toys, hearing aids, cotton from Q-tips and stones).** Once we rule all the weird stuff out, the therapy can begin.

The most important part of the therapy is YOU. So above all else stay out of your ears! The more **“wax” (the protective, lubricating antibiotic shield)** you remove, the higher the chance your ears become **itchy, painful or even swollen.** The other thing is try to **keep your ears dry.** Most showers and baths are OK but if you find water getting inside, try using **a 1/2 a cotton ball soaked with Vaseline.** This will make a custom, watertight seal every time.

Another great way to keep your ears itch free is **Coconut Oil (Mineral Oil also works).** OK this is **the one time you are allowed to use Q-tips.** Soak a Q-tip with your favorite Coconut Oil and apply it to the itchy spots. (Put your finger where the cotton ends so you don't go too deep.) We may provide you with a prescription strength ear drop like **CiproDex or Locacorten-Vioform** if the inflammation has gotten out of hand. There is also a **supercream called Topicort** which is so powerful it can only be used 5 days at a time but really works well. Rarely, we may add an antibiotic pill (severe diabetics or transplant patients).

Dr. Jon M. Adamis MD, FRCS (C)

Soak a Q-Tip with one of the following:

1. Coconut Oil

If not improving,
go to step #2

2. Polysporin ointment
(original)

If not improving,
go to step #3

3. Ciprodex drops

If not improving,
go to step #4

4. Topicort super cream