

Aural Hematomas in Dogs

What is a hematoma?

A hematoma is a localized mass of blood that is confined within an organ or tissue. This is also referred to as a “blood blister”. The most common type of hematoma in the dog is that affecting the pinna or ear flap. This is called an aural or ear hematoma.



Why do aural hematomas occur?

Ear hematomas occur when a blood vessel in the ear bursts and bleeds into the space between the ear cartilage and skin. This is most commonly associated with trauma such as scratching or shaking the ears and bite wounds. Dogs with ear infections may violently shake their head or scratch their ears causing an aural hematoma. Dogs with long, floppy ears are at greater risk for developing ear hematomas. Pets with clotting or bleeding disorders may also develop hematomas, with or without a history of trauma.

How is the aural hematoma treated?

There are two approaches used to treat aural hematomas. The first is the conservative approach. A needle is used to withdraw the fluid from within the pinna. An injection of a corticosteroid may be made into the area that contained the fluid. The pinna is bandaged so that pressure is applied to it to prevent recollection of fluid. This method is used when the hematoma is small or if financial limitations prevent surgery. However, the success rate is less than 50%.

Because the success rate is so low with conservative treatment, most ear hematomas are treated with surgery. If surgery is chosen, there are four commonly used steps. However, different situations require different surgical techniques.

The blood is removed from the pinna. This is accomplished by making a small incision in each end of the hematoma. A drain tube is passed through the hematoma and sutured to the ear. This assures drainage of any more blood or serum that accumulates in the area. Alternatively, the skin over the hematoma may be incised and opened completely. This is more likely to be used for more serious hematomas and for those in which the blood has clotted.

The space where the blood accumulated is obliterated. Since the skin over the hematoma has been pushed away from the cartilage, it must be reattached to it to prevent another hematoma from occurring. This is accomplished by a series of sutures that are passed completely through the ear flap.

The pinna is stabilized to prevent further damage. Shaking after the ear pinna has been sutured at this time may cause further damage to the ear. In some cases, the pinna is laid on top of the cat'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.

The cause of the problem is diagnosed and treated. Another important aspect of treatment is dealing with the cause of the shaking. If an infection is present, medication is prescribed to treat the problem. In some cases, there is a piece of foreign material lodged in the ear canal such as a tick, piece of grass, etc., which 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.

If it is a blood blister, won't it disappear with time, just like a bruise?

If left untreated, the surrounding ear tissues will die due to lack of blood supply and result in a knurled, cauliflower-shaped ear. Additionally, this condition will produce intense pain and should be corrected as soon as possible.

ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS: