

Cat's Ear Filled with Fluid

CatChannel veterinary expert, Arnold Plotnick, DVM, recommends a visit to a veterinary dermatologist.

By Arnold Plotnick, DVM

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Q: I have a 13-year-old female Persian that is an indoor cat. Three months ago, pus mixed with blood started to come from one of my cat's ears. When she shakes her head, I can hear fluid shaking around in her ear. It does seem to be a bit painful to her when you look inside her ear.

I've taken my cat to the vet four times. They tested for mites, gave her antibiotics (which seemed to help a little, but not much) and creams, but the cat's ear canal was too pus-filled to see anything. I returned to the vet one week later and had her sedated so they could look in her ear canal and suction out any fluids.

They said they could find nothing wrong with my cat's ear and do not know what the problem is. She is off the antibiotics now, but her ear is still full of fluid, and it is seeping out of her head. What should I do? I can't afford to keep taking her to the vet without her getting better. I have already spent well over \$400 dollars, and she is no better. I hate to see her suffer!

Any ideas as to what the problem could be?

A: This is a tricky question to answer. Ear mites would be unusual in a 13-year-old indoor cat. A bacterial infection is a possibility, but antibiotics have been given, and they haven't seemed to help much, according to what you've told me.

It is possible that your cat has a bacterial infection that is resistant to the antibiotic that she was prescribed. Your vet may need to culture your cat's ear discharge to see exactly what organism is present, and which antibiotics are most effective against it. Another possibility is a fungal/yeast infection. These infections do not respond to antibiotics; antifungal agents are required.

In an older cat, the possibility of a tumor way down deep in the ear canal has to be considered. For this, the cat needs to be sedated, and the ear canal inspected thoroughly with an otoscope (a device for looking into the ear canal). It sounds as though your vet has done this. Whether or not they failed to detect a tumor or polyp in the ear is impossible for me to say. At this point, I would consider a referral to a veterinary dermatologist. They specialize in companion animal skin disorders, and ear problems make up a large percentage of their practice. I know you've spent a lot of money already, but I do think you need to pursue this further with an expert in the field. These conditions are painful and uncomfortable for the cat, and a true diagnosis needs to be achieved.