

LEND ME YOUR BAT EARS

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A Frenchie's 'bat' ears are its trademark. Routine care will help keep them healthy and beautiful.

The most common ear ailment is otitis externa...inflamed or infected outer ear canal. The most common cause of this is allergies (atopic or food), and in some allergic dogs ear infections are the only symptom. Foreign bodies, excess wax production, hair in the outside opening that interferes with airflow, or a narrow canal (either present from birth or narrowed by scarring from earlier infections) may all cause or aggravate ear canal problems.

Keeping the hair trimmed in the outer opening may help, as will occasional cleansing of the ear with a good earwash to remove dirt, debris, and excess wax. If you observe your Frenchie scratching its ear or shaking its head more than just occasionally, suspect otitis externa.

Before you clean the ears, examine and sniff them. A foul odor or a discharge is a sign of an infection, and before you put anything in the ears you should ask the vet to examine them with an otoscope to make sure that the eardrum is intact. If the vet sees any sign of infection, then before you begin treatment ask that she take a culture and test any microbes for drug sensitivities.

If no infection is present but if there seems to be wax or dirt or something in the canal that's making the dog uncomfortable, then wash out the ears. The ear canal has a vertical part just inside the opening to the outside, and a more horizontal part that lies deeper and ends at the eardrum. When ear cleaner or medication is squirted into the ear, it will flow down the vertical part of the canal but has trouble going all the way into the horizontal part without help. For most effective penetration of the solution, hold your dog's head on its side, fill the canal with cleanser, and then massage the base of the ear for about one minute to 'pump' the fluid all the way in, producing a 'squishy' sound. You can do this with the head upright, but should be sure to do enough of the 'pumping action' to be effective.

After this is done, let the dog shake the stuff out (wear old clothes and do this outside). Use a cotton ball or tissue to wipe out whatever you can reach, but do NOT insert a swab, as you could damage the delicate lining of the canal or the eardrum itself. If the expelled liquid looks pretty dirty, repeat the process until it is clean. Occasional cleansing with a good canine ear cleaner (NOT one made for people) should keep wax and secretions and foreign matter from accumulating. A gentle cleanser without alcohol, without talc, and with some sort of wax-dissolving agent, drying agent like salicylic acid, and an acidic pH is good for routine cleansing. Your vet can advise you on what type of cleanser and how often to use it would be best for your dog. If there is infection, then selection of a medication should be done based on the results of the culture and sensitivity testing, just as with selection of any antibiotic.

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