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Benign ear cyst or tumor

Benign ear cysts are lumps or growths in the ear. They are not cancerous.

Causes

Sebaceous cysts are the most common type of cysts seen in the ear. These sack-like lumps are made up of dead skin cells and oils produced by oil glands in the skin.

Places they are likely to be found include:

- Behind the ear
- In the ear canal
- In the earlobe
- On the scalp

The exact cause of the problem is unknown. Cysts may occur when oils are produced in a skin gland faster than they can be released from the gland. They can also occur if the oil gland opening has become blocked and a cyst forms under the skin.

Benign bony tumors of the ear canal (exostoses and osteomas) are caused by excess growth of bone. Repeated exposure to cold water may increase the risk for benign bony tumors of the ear canal.

Symptoms

The symptoms of cysts include:

- Pain (if cysts are in the outside ear canal or if they get infected)
- Small soft skin lumps on, behind, or in front of the ear

The symptoms of benign tumors include:

- Ear discomfort
- Gradual hearing loss in one ear
- Repeated outer ear infections

Note: There may be no symptoms.

Exams and Tests

Benign cysts and tumors are most often found during a routine ear exam. This type of exam may include hearing tests (audiometry) and middle ear testing (tympanometry). When looking into the ear, the health care provider may see cysts or benign tumors in the ear canal.

Sometimes, a CT scan is needed.

This disease may also affect the results of the following tests:

- Caloric stimulation
- Electronystagmography

Treatment

Treatment is not needed if the cyst does not cause pain or affect hearing.

If a cyst becomes painful, it may be infected. Treatment may include antibiotics or removal of the cyst.

Benign bony tumors may increase in size over time. Surgery may be needed if a benign tumor is painful, interferes with hearing, or leads to frequent ear infections.

Outlook (Prognosis)

Benign ear cysts and tumors are slow-growing. They may sometimes shrink or may disappear on their own.

Possible Complications

Complications may include:

- Hearing loss, if the tumor is large
- Infection of the cyst
- Infection of the ear canal
- Wax trapped in the ear canal

When to Contact a Medical Professional

Contact your provider if you have:

- Symptoms of a benign ear cyst or tumor
- Discomfort, pain, or hearing loss

Alternative Names

Osteomas; Exostoses; Tumor - ear; Cysts - ear; Ear cysts; Ear tumors; Bony tumor of the ear canal; Furuncles

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