

## Health Watch -- Swimmer's Ear

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An inexpensive bottle of eardrops could prevent the need for an expensive prescription.

Swimming is one of the most popular summer activities. It's a way to have fun, stay cool and get some exercise, all at the same time. But swimming can have an unfortunate side effect: swimmer's ear.

It's an ear infection that occurs when water gets into the ear and mixes with ear wax. Doctors at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas say that creates the perfect growth medium for bacteria: the dark, enclosed space of the ear. Swimmer's ear can be painful, and it requires treatment with prescription antibiotic drugs.

It's much easier – and less expensive – to prevent swimmer's ear. [Dr. Barbara Schultz](#), a UT Southwestern ear, nose and throat specialist, says you can prevent swimmer's ear with inexpensive over-the-counter ear drops. You can also make a solution at home, with half rubbing alcohol and half white vinegar. Put a few drops in each ear when you leave the water for the day, and the solution will dry up the water in the ear. Don't use a cotton swab to clean out your ears – or stick anything else in your ear. That just pushes ear wax and other material deeper into the ear.

People with damaged eardrums or surgically implanted tubes in their ears may be able to swim, but they should get their doctor's approval and advice first. They may need to take extra precautions. These people shouldn't use the drying drops after swimming because it could be very painful.

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