



Dr Wolfgang Muller (Consultant Paediatrician)

Parent Information Guide:

Preventing Swimmer's Ear in Children

What is swimmer's ear?

Swimmer's ear (otitis externa) is an infection of the ear canal, often caused by water remaining in the ear after swimming. The warm, moist environment allows bacteria or fungi to grow, leading to pain, itching, and sometimes discharge.

Children who swim regularly, have narrow ear canals, or produce less earwax are more prone to this condition.

How to prevent it

Prevention works in two stages: before and after swimming.

Before swimming — keep water out

Barrier drops create a protective, water-repellent coating inside the ear canal. Apply a few drops to each ear shortly before entering the water.

Available oil-based barrier drops:

Product	Key Ingredients
Earol Swim	Olive oil + tea tree oil
Vaxol	Olive oil
Swim-Eze	Mineral oil



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Physical barriers:

Option	Description
Silicone ear plugs	Mouldable, single-use plugs available from pharmacies
Custom-fitted swim moulds	Made by an audiologist for a precise fit; most effective option
Swim headband	Worn over the ears to keep plugs secure, especially helpful for younger children

After swimming — dry and acidify

If water does get in, these drops help remove moisture and restore the ear's natural acidity, which prevents bacterial and fungal growth.

Available acidifying/drying drops:

Product	Key Ingredients	Availability
EarCalm	Acetic acid 2%	Prescription only
Acetic acid ear drops (generic)	Acetic acid 2%	Prescription
Swim Ear	Isopropyl alcohol + acetic acid	Available online
Aqua Ear	Isopropyl alcohol + acetic acid	Available online

Simple drying techniques:

- Gently tip the head to each side to let water drain
- Pull the earlobe gently in different directions to help release trapped water
- Use a hairdryer on the lowest heat setting, held at arm's length from the ear

Important safety notes

- Do not use acidifying or alcohol-based drops if your child has:
 - Grommets (ventilation tubes)
 - A perforated eardrum
 - An existing ear infection
 - Broken or irritated skin in the ear canal
- Do not insert cotton buds or other objects into the ear canal — this can damage the skin and push debris further in, increasing infection risk.
- If unsure whether a product is suitable for your child, check with your GP or pharmacist first.



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When to seek help

See a pharmacist or GP if your child develops:

- Ear pain or tenderness
- Itching inside the ear
- Discharge or unpleasant smell
- Reduced hearing
- Redness or swelling around the ear

Early treatment can prevent the infection from worsening.

Quick summary

When	What to use	Options available
Before swimming	Oil-based barrier drops	Earol Swim, Vaxol, Swim-Eze
Before swimming	Physical barriers	Ear plugs, custom swim moulds, swim headband
After swimming	Acidifying/drying drops	EarCalm, acetic acid drops, Swim Ear, Aqua Ear

With consistent use, these simple steps can significantly reduce your child's chances of developing swimmer's ear.

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