

# Waxy Ear Canal in a Cat

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Allergies in cats can be very difficult to identify and treat, as we recently found out with our cat 'Sefi', who is a 6-year-old indoor cat.

After adopting her and her daughter in February 2006, we had only had them for a couple of months, when we noticed 'Sefi' had blackish discharge in her left ear only. It was clearly bothering her, as she was scratching and shaking her head. We immediately thought it was ear mites, as did our vet. After a period of one month the ear had not improved despite Revolution® having been used after the initial diagnosis. It was then thought that she was suffering from otitis externa and we were prescribed Panalog® ointment.

About another month passed and still there was no improvement. A swab was taken for culture and sensitivity testing. No bacteria were isolated but occasional yeast identified as *Aspergillus terreus*. Xrays showed increased density in the bulla and an osteotomy recommended. While we did not want to put Sefi through the trauma of this operation, we believed at the time, that it would be the answer to her problem. After surgery, Clavulox® drops were prescribed together with Surolan®. Two months later, the ear was still discharging and we were referred to a specialist cat vet.

The specialist cat vet diagnosed chronic otitis and also carried out further culture and sensitivity testing which also proved inconclusive and again showed aspergillus. Otomax® drops were prescribed. Over a two week period, there was no change in the condition of the ear and we were warned that further surgery may be necessary. Fungafite® cream was then prescribed, with no improvement over a three week period.

Obviously, by now, we were highly concerned and frustrated at the lack of progress we had made and the costs out layed which had provided no answers as to why she had the condition or what was causing it. As a last resort, our vet told us about Dr Richard Malik at the PGF.

Upon contacting Dr Malik, the first step was for us to stop all topical treatments. As it can be seen, a lot of ear medications were tried on a continual basis and as in our cat's case, more often than not, these can be more of a hindrance than a help. Swabs were also sent to Dr Malik for his consideration, and while no fungi or aspergillus could be seen, there was a large amount of wax and debris present. (Cytology was courtesy of Prof Paul Canfield.)

Dr Malik then asked us about her diet (she was on Eukanuba Low Residue biscuits) and recommended we cut them out altogether, as some types of dry food can exacerbate oil production in the ear canal. It was suggested that we try her with fresh meat. After changing her diet, it didn't take long for us to see a rapid improvement in the condition of her ear and the happiness of our cat.

Since then, we have intermittently tried her on a variety of commercial tinned food and biscuits, but they all appear to exacerbate the problem.

In our cat's case, it seems evident that a fresh meat diet is appropriate for her allergy problem. She also has small servings of Hills ZD Low Allergen biscuits, which while still causing a slight waxing of the ear, seem to be the ones tolerated best.

We have learnt that while our vet went through appropriate routine testing to find the cause of Sefi's ear problems, there isn't always an obvious diagnosis and factors such as diet and environment should be investigated in the first instance.



Above right: Sefi.  
Right: Discharge from ear.