**EAR INFECTIONS (OTITIS) AND YOUR PET**

Otitis is a common addition in both dogs and cats. There are many causes but the main cause is the anatomy of the ear. The car canal is an inverted "L". Once an infection starts in the ear, where the temperature is at least body temperature, it literally cooks as in an incubator. Usually combined with large, heavy floppy ears or hairy ears, we have a severe Otitis. Ear infections can be caused by bacteria, yeast or mites or a combination of these.

Prevention is not often possible, yet we can try a few things to prevent first time problems and recurrent infections. Do not allow your pet to swim in lakes, ponds or rivers you wouldn't swim in. Place cotton in the animal's ears when bathing. Both of these events can cause water in the ears which can lead to an infection. Also, keep the ears clean of hair and any discharges. Routine cleaning with an ear cleanser approved by your veterinarian can prevent many ear infections.

Signs of Otitis are shaking their heads, flopping their ears, scratching at the ears, a head tilt towards the infected ear, odor or a discharge. The type of infection is diagnosed by an ear slide, gram stain or culture. These tests tell us if the infection is caused by mites, bacteria or yeast of a combination infection. Treatment is usually either a type of ear drops, or for severe infections, oral antibiotics and/or ear flush under anesthesia.

Remember Otitis is a common problem. But with early diagnosis and treatment, it can be taken care of painlessly and quickly.