The Dramas of Ears and Swimming

Firstly, let's set things straight! Ear infections are not caused by being in the pool. Science tells us so. The reality is that a low-grade infection is already in the ear and by putting water into the ear, we exacerbate an existing problem.

As a swimming teacher I have had more ear infections than any other medical issue in my life! They are incredibly painful and downright difficult to get rid of all together. For many years I had a permanent repeat prescription for antibiotics for my ears. Not good, but at the time I couldn't find an alternative.

When a child says their ear hurts, sometimes it's to get out of something and other times it's real. Always play on the side of real because the pain is excruciating and as a parent you're in for a tough night.

I know from experience that you can see a doctor and they will say the ears are clear. I played the experiment a few times by going to the doctor at 9am to be told my ears are clear. I would then teach in the afternoon and spend an awful night in agony. I'd visit the doctor at 9am the next day with a serious infection. The doctor said to me that he believed the day before, the infection was too small for him to see.

My experience is that the best way to help the issue is to stay out of the water. It's not just the pool! The shower and yes, even rain in the ear can set it off. This has been my experience! I recommend a minimum of three months and have another try. If the issue still exists, please take another 6 months out of lessons. Honestly, and yes, the child's swimming will regress, but at this point in time, their ears are more important! Upon returning to swimming many children are still very unsure about putting their heads back in the water, particularly when on their back. This is normal and simply be patient while they learn to trust that it won't hurt.

Below is what I found helped me immensely. This is my experience and what has worked for me. I am not a medico and I share this only for those who wish to try and see if it works for them, when you've tried everything else and the problem doesn't get better. I have been doing this for over 10 years now and not had to have any ear anti biotics since then.

Swim Seal is a product we sell at Seadragonz. A couple of drops in each ear a few minutes before getting into the water provides a water repellent coating. The manufacturer claims it helps prevent swimmers' ear. This is because the repellent coating lets the water run past the ear and not into it. Many swimming teachers have found this really helpful.

On the rare occasion I don't put Swim Seal in my ears or I'm caught in the shower or rain and water does get in my ear and within a day I feel that tenderness in and around the ear….I use Mullein Oil. A couple of drops a day for two days and the pain goes away and it doesn't progress to an ear infection. Mullein Oil has been used for centuries for ear pain. It is available from anywhere that sells Tinderbox products. My experience though, is that if you leave it beyond this point, i.e. a serious infection, the Mullein Oil is ineffective.

I hope this helps you and your family dealing with this painful and annoying issue. Feel free to talk to me when at the pool, if you want more information. I must repeat though, that this information is not from any form of medical science, simply what I have learned works for me after years of constant anti biotics for my recurring ear infections and the pain that goes with it.

As a swimming teacher I knew I could not continue a job I loved, if I did not get on top of my ear infection issues.

Seadragonz philosophy is to teach with love. There's no love when a child is forced to participate in swimming lessons when the impact is pain. Children only understand and associate that when they swim, their ears hurt, which is not the way it should be. We know that learning to swim is a critical life skill, but please take the time out of lessons to let the ears heal completely. Children need to love being in the water to learn to swim, when pain is present, that's not possible.