One of the most recognizable features of the Chinese Shar-Pei is their unique triangular shaped ears that lie close to the head. The small, tight ear flap causes very little air circulation, resulting in moisture and natural ear wax being caught in the ear canal. The end result is the potential for foul smelling ear infections. The best way to keep this under control is through routine ear maintenance.

Symptoms of an Ear Infections
Symptoms of ear inflammation in the Chinese Shar-Pei are head shaking, a noticeable head tilt, scratching in the ear area, a foul odor from the ear often accompanied by an ear discharge, reddened ear flap or a swollen painful ear or ear canal.

Routine Ear Care
The primary problem with ear cleaning in the Shar-Pei is lack of cooperation by the dog. If your dog will not let you clean the ears, you will not be able to treat the ears. Training begins as a puppy and involves being firm and using positive reinforcement methods, such as rewarding your Shar-Pei with treats. If your Shar-Pei has not had the advantage of being trained as a puppy, patience and persistence will eventually help make the job an easier one to handle.

Part of the problem is caused by the most common method used to clean ears – the cotton swab being pushed down into the ear canal. Improper use results in trauma to the ear canal with swelling and pain for your Shar-Pei. This results in an uncooperative dog!

Do Not Use Hydrogen Peroxide!
The foaming bothers the dog and the peroxide breaks down into water and oxygen in the ear. This causes ear canals which are NOT clean and dry, resulting in the growth of bacteria and yeast.

The Best Way to Clean Ears
The BEST WAY to clean an ear is to “float” the debris out of the canal using an ear cleaning solution. A wide variety are available on the market. Ask your vet for a recommendation or try different ones and see which one works best for you.

The smartest owners do this outside if possible. The principle is to allow the cleaning solution to loosen the debris in the ear and to allow the dog to shake the material out of the ear once it is loosened.

Steps for a Clean Ear
1. Put your Shar-Pei on a grooming table, in your lap or on the floor or sofa. Be sure he is comfortable.
2. Fill the ear canal with cleaning solution.
3. Gently massage both ears.
4. Allow him to shake his head. Stand back!
5. Even though much of the debris flies out of the ear, a portion will catch on the flap and inside of the ear.
6. Clean this debris off with a cotton ball soaked in the ear cleaning solution.
7. Only wipe the ear flaps and the part of upper canal that you can see.
8. Repeat until the ears canal is clean.
9. Reward your Shar-Pei for being good!
When Swelling is Evident
Apply an ear ointment to soothe the canal. Check with your vet for the proper one to use.
If the ears are very swollen, red and infected, it is best to see your vet as soon as possible. The infection may be down deep in the ear canal and the ointment may not be able to reach the inflamed location. Your Vet will be able to give you the proper medication to reduce this swelling to help reduce the inflammation.

Help Prevent Problem Ears!
Weekly cleaning will help keep your ears free of debris that may cause this inflammation and swelling.

Causes of Ear Infections
Ear infections in the Shar-Pei are caused by a variety of things such as:
1. Yeast – this is the number one cause of ear infections in Shar-Pei. Yeast likes a warm, dark environment and that is exactly what the typical, tight closed ear canal of the Shar-Pei provides. It is similar to athlete’s foot in the ear and produces a moist, brown musty smelling discharge.
2. Bacteria – most bacteria infections are secondary to yeast infections. It has a watery, foul smelling discharge and often is associated with ulceration of the ear flap and canal. Many are resistant to antibiotics, so an ear culture by your vet will be necessary.
3. Allergies – both food allergies and inhalant allergies can cause itching of the ears with resultant infections from the trauma of the dog scratching the ears. Drug allergies and irritating substances can also contribute to this type of infection.
4. Hypothyroidism – Low thyroid level is often associated with an increase in wax production in the ear canal. This can then become infected. Hypothyroidism is also associated with decreased immune system function.
5. Parasites – Various parasites can cause ear disease such as ear mites, demodectic mange, sarcoptic mange, fleas, etc.
6. Autoimmune Diseases – certain autoimmune diseases can affect the ear flap and canal.

Medications Used for Ear Infections
Medications used for ear infections fall into following four categories:
1. Antibiotics – these should be used based on the culture of the ear which will tell your Vet exactly what bacteria is causing the problem. From this information, your Vet will know what antibiotic to use most effectively.
2. Antifungals – these solutions primarily are used to eliminate yeast infections. The result of the yeast infection is an inflammation condition similar to “swimmer’s ear” in humans.
3. Antiseptics – bacteria are attacked chemically by these medications. They may include iodine solutions or chlorhexidine solutions or often a combination of the two.
4. Combinations – various combinations of the above drugs are often used, sometimes in combination with topical steroids to decrease the inflammation of the ear canal.

Which Medication To Use?
Your vet uses a variety of criteria to make this decision. Typical examples are:
1. Ear culture and sensitivity results.
2. Vet’s preference based on his/her experience with Shar-Pei and ear infections.
3. Trial and error if all else fails.

What Is Your Responsibility in Stopping an Ear Infection?
You must be persistent in cleaning the ear on a regular basis. You clean the ear before adding the medication and you can’t miss giving the proper medication as directed by the Vet. Ear problems can be controlled if care is taken to keep the ears clean on a regular basis and the medication is administered on a regular basis under the direction of a Vet.

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