



EXOSTOSES (Surfer's Ear)

Exostoses are benign bony growths in the external auditory canal. Their progressive growth is caused by many years of repeated exposure to cold water and wind, such as our dedicated surfers on the Pacific Coast often experience. The cold stimulates bone growth and the ear canal gradually narrows, and is usually worse in the ear that faces the ocean at the time of "catching the wave." This new bone is more sensitive than the original bone. Water and debris can get trapped behind the bony growth and ears are easily blocked and infected. The bony growth can completely fill the canal and cause hearing loss.

The rate of bone growth can be slowed or stopped by religious use of earplugs. A wetsuit hood may also help. Waterproof plugs are available at local drug stores, we have Docs Pro Plugs available in our office, or Physicians Hearing Aid Center can custom fit plugs. The custom plugs have the advantage of staying in very well, and the surf-style plugs are bored out in the middle to allow for better hearing and balance. This requires a 15 minute appointment to make ear impressions, then a short fitting appointment two weeks later. An alcohol-based swimmers eardrop can help dry any residual moisture in the canal after water exposure.

When the ear canal is significantly narrowed a surgical procedure may be required to re-open the canal. It is important to stay out of the water until the ear canal is completely healed, which takes 3-6 weeks. The surgery is performed under general anesthesia and usually takes about two hours. Hearing testing is performed before and after the surgery.