

Cauliflower Ears

'Cauliflower ear' is the term given to those whom suffer from lumpy or heavily scarred external ears, usually as the result of repeated trauma, occurring often in boxers and wrestlers and rugby players.

How are Cauliflower Ears Formed?

A 'cauliflower ear' (Auricular haematoma) may be caused by a combination of friction and compressive forces or sudden blow. The haematoma can develop from one trauma or the cumulative effect of many smaller blows to the ear. [View diagram to see a cauliflower ear](#)

If this happens, blood clots can form under the skin and prevent blood flow from reaching the damaged part of the ear. If blood flow is restricted, oxygen and nutrients to allow it to heal cannot reach the area and the cartilage may remain permanently misshapen. The damaged cartilage can shrivel and take on the appearance of the top of a cauliflower, hence the name cauliflower ears.

Treating Cauliflower Ears

For successful treatment of cauliflower ear, medical advice must be sought immediately after the injury has occurred. This is because the fluid that has collected under the skin, or the blood clot, has to be evacuated from the area as soon as possible in order for healthy blood flow to the area to resume and aid healing.

The doctor will normally remove the blood clot with a syringe. They will then clean the area to remove bacteria and debris and place a clean sterile dressing over the ear. This dressing will act as a compress to the affected area helping to prevent any further swelling or bleeding. The dressing will normally remain in situ for up to ten days when it will be removed and the wound re-assessed and treated as necessary; this may mean applying a fresh dressing for a further period of time

During this treatment over the counter painkillers may be advised to relieve discomfort and the person should refrain from any activities that may cause further trauma or risk removal or soiling of the dressing. You may be recommended a course of antibiotics as the outer ear can become infected easily risking the overall health of the more delicate parts of the ear. As these injuries usually occur from contact with others, this also increases the risk of infections developing. The full course of antibiotics must be taken in order for them to be most effective.

Preventing Cauliflower Ears

Rugby players, especially forwards tend to wear their cauliflower ears as a badge of honour, however prevention is best especially as if left untreated hearing problems may result. If you do not wish to be permanently deformed, and especially as a front five forward, you may chose to wear a head guard or tape your ears. A new product called '[impact](#)' has also proved effective in both prevention and treatment of cauliflower ear

Remember that treatment must be sought immediately after the injury occurs in order for it to be most successful.

Useful link: <http://www.cauliflowerear.co.uk/>