My ear is bleeding! [1]

Alice,

I need help. What do I do if I feel like I have an ear ache, only it's bleeding and clear stuff is coming out of it?

Answer

Dear Reader,

The short and sweet answer to your question is that it's best to call your health care provider, an ear, nose, and throat specialist (sometimes called an ENT), or head to an urgent care or emergency room as soon as possible. Since you have bloody discharge coming from your ear, it's possible that your eardrum (the tissue-thin membrane in your ear that vibrates to let you hear sound) might have been perforated (ruptured). Often when damage happens, pus is produced, possibly explaining the "clear stuff" to which you're referring. If this injury goes untreated, you might lose some or all of your hearing in that ear. Other possible explanations that may lead to ear discharge include a buildup of wax, skin irritations in the ear canal, or swimmer's ear (though typically these conditions don't result in bleeding). However, the only way to know what you have is to seek immediate medical attention for assessment and any appropriate treatment.

Back to a perforated eardrum: you might be wondering what could cause such an injury. A perforation, or hole in your eardrum, may be caused by an infection in your middle ear or injury from inserting cotton swabs or other objects into your ear, exposure to a very loud noise, sudden air pressure changes (this sometimes happens when in an airplane), or a severe head injury. A health care provider may ask if you've experienced any of these incidents.

During a medical visit, you may also have a sample of the discharge collected from your ear and conduct different hearing tests to determine what might be causing your pain and discharge. If diagnosed with a perforated eardrum, typical treatment could include anti-inflammatory or antibiotic medication, but sometimes these injuries are able to heal by themselves. However, there are other times it's necessary to use an eardrum patch or have surgery to feel (and hear!) better.

Until you're able to seek medical care, there are some things you might do to keep your ear from getting worse. Avoid swimming and try to keep water out of your ear when showering or bathing. Also, avoiding the insertion of anything into your ear to clean it is advised. Finally, try
not to blow your nose, as that may create pressure that might damage your ear further.

H(ear)’s to feeling better!

Alice!
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