



## Otorrhoea

Otorrhoea, or ear discharge, is a sign and symptom of outer and middle ear disease. Inner ear disease does not cause discharge (or ear pain for that matter).

The characteristics of the discharge can give some clues as to the underlying cause. In the table below the character is paired with a diagnosis. Remember that life is seldom so simple and that there is overlap between character and diseases. Nonetheless, these characteristics are beloved of exam setters and clinicians alike.

Diagnosis	Character
Eczematous or psoriatic otitis externa	Dry flaky skin Occasional thin fluid from the ear leading to crusting in the meatus Little pain
Bacterial otitis externa	Thick and scanty Generally white or creamy Usually doesn't smell much Quite painful
Fungal otitis externa	Scanty discharge White, hairy tufts or caseous (soft cheese like) collections Occasional wet newspaper appearance Surprisingly painful
Acute otitis media with perforation	Discharge of pus with streak of blood Immediate relief of pain on appearance of discharge High volume Not offensive
Chronic perforation	High volume mucus like discharge Colour varies from grey sticky to yellow No pain
Cholesteatoma	Scanty discharge often limited to drum or attic Green colour Foul smell No pain
Canal malignancy	Extremely rare May be painful Blood stained thin discharge Rotting smell at times