



3 Mahoney Ave.
Rutland, VT 05701
(802) 773-3553
www.rutlandskin.com
Daniel P. McCauliffe, M.D.

chondrodermatitis nodularis helicis (sore spot on the ear)

What is chondrodermatitis nodularis helicis (CNH)?

CNH is a painful spot that typically occurs on the prominent part of the cartilage of one ear. It is most common in middle aged and elderly people, and more often in men. The spot is usually small, but sometimes is much bigger than the diameter of the eraser on a pencil. It can come and go, but usually lasts for months and sometimes years. It can sometimes ulcerate, drain fluid or bleed. It can mimic a skin cancer.

What causes CNH?

CNH appears to be caused by prolonged pressure on the ear. This prolonged pressure apparently cuts off the blood supply to the skin and cartilage of the ear causing injury. The most common cause of the prolonged pressure is from the head resting on a pillow while sleeping at night. This typically occurs in people who sleep predominantly on one side, so that the affected ear is resting against the pillow most of the night. CNH can be precipitated or aggravated by minor trauma, exposure to cold weather, or from other pressure on the ear such as from tight headgear, earphones or a telephone headset. It was common among telephone operators back in the early days of telephone communication when human operators wore head sets over one ear for hours at a time, while assisting callers. .

How is CNH diagnosed?

Usually the history of the sore spot and its appearance make the diagnosis straightforward, but sometimes a biopsy is recommended to rule out skin cancer, as skin cancer can look similar, and often occurs on the ears.

How is CNH treated?

- The ideal treatment is to sleep off the affected ear, and sleep on the other side and back. Unfortunately many people with CNH find it difficult to do that.
- Changing pillows to a softer one, or a “memory foam” pillow can sometimes be helpful. A memory foam pillow can be ordered from Amazon.com.
- Some companies make special “donut hole” pillows and ear protectors for CNH. You can find some of these at Amazon.com by typing in “CNH pillow” or “ear donut pillow” in the search window. One of my patients had good results with a pillow he purchased from: www.thepillowwithahole.uk
- Here is another source of a CNH pillow: http://www.cnhpillow.com/how_it_helps.php
- If the CNH spot is ulcerated, apply Vaseline (white petrolatum) or an antibiotic ointment, and cover it with a band aid.
- A cortisone injection or freeze with liquid nitrogen can sometimes help.
- Surgical treatment to remove the bump can help, or at least temporarily, as CNH can sometimes return, sometimes above or below the surgery site.
- People with CNH should keep their ears warm during cold weather but should avoid wearing very tight fitting hats.