

Self-care for earwax removal

An information guide



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Earwax

Earwax is a normal build-up of dead cells, hair, and foreign material such as dust, and natural wax which forms a protective coating on the skin in the ear canal.

The quantity of earwax produced varies greatly from person to person. The movement of your jaw while eating and talking naturally moves the wax along the canal.

A plug of earwax is not a serious problem. You only need to remove earwax if it is causing symptoms such as dulled hearing or when fitting a hearing aid.

Ear irrigation

Ear irrigation, also known as ear syringing, is no longer recommended as a first line treatment for blocked ears. Ear irrigation can lead to ear infections, perforated ear drum and tinnitus which is a persistent noise.

Your pharmacist can help with earwax build-up. They can give advice and suggest the treatment. Further information can be found on the NHS webpage: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/earwax-build-up/>

Preventing earwax build-up

You can't prevent earwax. It's there to protect your ears from dirt and germs. However, you can keep using ear drops to soften the wax.

This will help it fall out on its own and should prevent blocked ears. If you are prone to repeated wax build up you can continue to use olive oil drops twice a week to prevent recurrence.

What makes Earwax worse?

The amount of wax produced varies from person to person.

Some people produce excessive amounts of wax and this can block the ear canal, wearing a hearing aid, ear plugs and or head phones can interfere with wax expulsion and if you are elderly – the wax produced may be harder and drier.

What you shouldn't do

If you think you have earwax, do not try to clean the ear canal with cotton wool buds. This can make things worse, as you will push some earwax deeper inside. It may also cause an ear infection.

Do not use objects such as matches, hair grips, crochet hooks, knitting needles, keys etc. this can cause trauma and possible infection.

If your ears are itchy **do not** scratch or rub them with your finger nails or any other objects.

What helps?

Try and keep your ears dry.

When washing your hair, showering or swimming putting some Vaseline around the inner part of your ear can help. Don't put your head under the water when bathing.

If you regularly get blocked ears, use ear drops weekly/fortnightly to soften the wax.

When to see your GP

If you are experiencing the following symptoms:

- Pain
- Discharge or bleeding from the ear
- Sudden deafness
- Dizziness

What can you do to manage your earwax?

Ear drops alone will clear a plug of earwax in most cases. Put 4 or 5 drops of ordinary olive oil down the ear using a 'dropper' twice a day for 7 to 10 days. This softens the wax so that it then runs out of its own accord without harming the ear.

Do not use any ears drops if you have a hole in your eardrum called a perforated eardrum.

How to use ear drops:

1. Warm the drops to room temperature before using them .



2. Lie with the affected ear uppermost and insert 4 to 5 drops .



3. Massage the front of the ear to encourage the oil to flow down the ear canal.



Stay like this for at least 5 minutes to allow the drops to soak into the earwax.

You can continue for any length of time, but 3 weeks is usually enough. Surprisingly, you will not necessarily see wax come out. It often seems to come out unnoticed.

Further information can be found at <https://www.pat.nhs.uk/hmr-ear-care-service.htm>

If English is not your first language and you need help, please contact the Interpretation and Translation Service

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