

Care of your ears.

How to I treat earwax at home?

If you have a build-up of earwax, please read the following self help guide:

Earwax is normal and is produced to form a protective coating over the skin in the ear canal. Ears are usually self-cleaning, the movement of your jaw while eating and talking helps to move the wax along the ear canal where it will fall out without you noticing.

The amount of wax produced varies from person to person, but you are more likely to experience a build-up if you:

- Use cotton buds, ear candles, fingers etc to clean the ear as it pushes the wax deeper into the ear canal.
- Wear a hearing aid, ear plugs or use in ear speakers e.g., Air Pods as this interferes with the normal wax expulsion.
- Have narrow ear canals.
- Have hairy ear canals.
- Are elderly as the wax tends to be drier and harder.
- Have a dry skin condition such as eczema or psoriasis.

DO NOT use cotton buds, ear candles, Q Grips devices, bulb syringes, fingers etc to try and clean your ears. It may seem you are removing wax but most of the wax will be pushed deep into the ear canal and may scratch or damage the ear canal. Ears clean themselves and small bits of wax fall out occasionally – this is normal.

Ear wax is only a problem if it causes deafness or discomfort. Most patients can successfully manage ear wax build up by following the self-care options continued below.

A Pharmacist can help you treat your earwax buildup at home.

Routine ear wax removal is not necessary or recommended – ear wax protects the ears, thus repeatedly stripping it away can lead to infection etc.

How do I use eardrops or sprays?

1. Wash your hands.
2. Hold the bottle in your hand for a few minutes to bring the drops closer to body temperature. Do not place the bottle in hot water or warm in the microwave.
3. Twist the cap anti-clockwise to remove it. For some bottles, you may need to remove the security band and use the cap to pierce the nozzle.
4. Lie on your side with your affected ear facing upwards toward the ceiling when applying eardrops. For ear sprays, sit upright.

5. Gently pull the outer ear (pinna) backwards and upwards to open the ear canal.
6. Squeeze 3 drops into the affected ear or spray once.
7. **Do not plug the ear canal with cotton wool, cotton buds, paper tissues etc.**
8. Remain on your side for at least 3 minutes to allow the liquid to soak in.
9. Don't worry if some liquid runs out, you can wipe your neck and outer ear with a tissue. **Do not insert tissues into the ear.**
10. If required, repeat the process for the other ear.
11. Clean the nozzle and replace the cap after use.
12. Repeat 1-2 daily for 14 days.
13. Your hearing may initially worsen after using ear drops, this is normal.

Once the wax is cleared, it is recommended you continue to use your wax softening eardrops or spray 1-2 a week to stop the wax building up again.

Can I use eardrops if I have a perforated eardrum?

Olive Oil and Hydrogen Peroxide eardrops are not recommended for use with a perforation. Sodium Bicarbonate drops are safe to use with a perforation.

What if Wax Softeners have not worked?

If you have used eardrops twice a day for 2 weeks and your symptoms have not resolved, please make an appointment with a Practice Nurse or Health Care Assistant at your surgery to be assessed.

In some instances, you may be referred to for Microsuction Wax Removal. Not all surgeries have suitably trained staff or equipment to offer this, and you may be required to travel to another local surgery. The service is in **very high demand** and there is likely to be a wait of several weeks before you can be seen. There are also several local private providers who offer Microsuction such as Specsavers, Boots and Hagley Hearing Centre.

Manual Ear syringing is no longer available at your GP Practice as NHS England and NHS Improvement recognise it is no longer advised by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence due to risks associated, such as trauma to their ear drum or infection.

References:

ENT UK (2022)'How to Use Eardrops or Sprays' [Online]. Available from:
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(Accessed 08/11/2023).

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