

Earwax

Department of Ear, Nose & Throat

Information for Patients

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If there is a build-up of wax in your ear(s), please read the following guide as you may not need an hospital appointment.

What is earwax?

Earwax is a normal build-up of dead cells, hair, other material such as dust along with the natural wax produced by your ears. This wax forms a protective coating over the skin in the ear canal.

Ears are normally self-cleaning. When you eat and talk the movement of the jaw helps to move the wax along the ear canal where it will usually fall out without you noticing.

Why is my ear blocked with wax?

The amount of earwax produced varies from person to person. Some people produce large amounts which can lead to a blockage in the ear canal.

You are more likely to develop a blockage of wax in the ear canal if you:

- use cotton ear buds to clean the ear as this pushes the wax deeper into the canal
- wear a hearing aid, ear plugs or use in-ear speakers. These can all stop the wax leaving the ear naturally
- have abnormally narrow ear canals
- have a very hairy ear canal
- are elderly as the earwax you make is drier and harder
- have a dry skin problem such as eczema or psoriasis.

**Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

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Treating earwax blockages

Earwax only becomes a problem if it causes deafness, discomfort or if your Health professional needs to see your ear drum.

If you are having any of the following, you should speak to your GP or Nurse Practitioner:

- pain
- discharge or bleeding from the ear
- sudden deafness or buzzing
- foreign bodies in the ear (cotton bud, part of a hearing aid etc)
- Dizziness

If you are not having any of the above, try the following steps using olive oil to treat the blockage.

Using olive oil drops

(It is advisable to buy a bottle of olive oil and dropper from your local chemist.)

The following needs to be done 2 times a day for a minimum of 1 week

1. Warm the drops to near body temperature by holding the container in the palm of your hand for a few minutes before applying.
2. Lie on your side with the affected ear uppermost.
3. Pull the outer ear gently backwards and upwards to straighten the ear canal.
4. Put 2 to 3 drops of olive oil into the affected ear(s) and gently massage just in front of the ear.
5. Stay laying on your side to allow the wax to soak in for around 5 to 10 minutes.
6. Wipe away any excess oil but do not put cotton wool in your ear as this will absorb the oil.

Your hearing problem may get worse when you start to use the olive oil drops. We advise you to treat 1 ear at a time if both ears are blocked with wax.

If the ear wax is very hard and doesn't appear to shift with olive oil, your GP may advise sodium bicarbonate drops.

In most cases, the wax will have softened enough to encourage it to move out without further help.

If you are still having a problem with your hearing, please contact your GP for further advice.

If your ears are regularly becoming blocked with wax, after clearing the blockage we will usually suggest you follow steps 1 to 5 to keep the wax soft and encourage the natural process of wax expulsion.

If you have any concerns using olive oil drops, please speak to your pharmacist or GP before starting treatment.

Contact details:

Please contact your GP or local pharmacist for further advice

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Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

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