

Ear Care

Caring for your ears

- Wax is normal – it protects and lubricates the Ear Canal.
- It is a mixture of Cerumen (a sweat-like substance), Sebum (an oily substance) both secreted by glands in your Ear Canal, which combines with dust, debris, hair etc. to form ear wax. It is normal to have ear wax, and it usually only becomes a problem when it has been pushed deeper into the Ear Canal.
- Your ears are self-cleaning – if you use cotton wool buds or similar objects, to try to remove the wax, it will only be pushed further into the ear canal and become impacted and block your ear.
- If you have repeated problems with wax blocking your ears, using olive oil ear drops – 2 drops once a week may prevent this.
- If you have ear problems such as dry skin, eczema, dermatitis, 'runny ears', you will find keeping your ears DRY will improve the condition. Avoid shampoo, shower gel and hairspray etc. in your ears.
- The easiest way to keep your ears dry when bathing or showering is by using ear plugs or a piece of cotton-wool smeared with Vaseline/Petroleum jelly.
- Your ears should only be cleaned by a nurse trained in ear care as they can see into your ear canals – you are unable to do this!

Ear Syringing- An alternative

Evidence suggests that ear syringing may not be as safe as we thought. Even though syringing is undertaken by trained staff syringing may result in inflamed and infected ear canals. Only very rarely should syringing be necessary. The application of ear drops should disperse excessive wax and regular application of drops will prevent the buildup of wax. The drops are inexpensive to buy from a chemist or pharmacy or indeed some large supermarkets but unfortunately we are unable to provide these on prescription.

Here is what to do:

You can self-manage the buildup of ear wax. In most cases the application of ear drops will disperse the buildup of wax. Drops should be used three times a day for at least **4 weeks**. Cotton-buds or ear candles should not be used as these can do real damage to the ear canal and drum.

Once the ears are clear of wax, it can be helpful to continue to use the drops twice a week to help keep them clear. If during the application of the drops you continue to suffer from hearing loss or if you have other ear symptoms such as unpleasant discharge or pain, you should see a doctor or nurse.

How to use ear drops

- Use olive oil, sodium bicarbonate ear drops or other branded products that are available for dispersing ear wax. These are available from chemists or pharmacies and the Pharmacist can explain the different types. Brandnames you may have heard of include Earex, Cerumol and Otex (there are others).
- The drops should be at room temperature before use.
- Lay on your side with the affected ear uppermost and place three to five drops into the ear canal. Let the drops soak in for at least 5 minutes.

- You can use some cotton wool (dampened with water or Vaseline) placed at the entrance to the canal to stop drops running out as you get up afterwards.
- Repeat three times a day to the affected ear until the wax has gone and your hearing improves.

This process should result in your hearing improving after 4 weeks.

Sodium bicarbonate drops are better for dissolving stubbornly hard wax but should not be used for more than 2 weeks as it may result in irritation to the skin. If you still feel that you have wax after 2 weeks of using sodium bicarbonate, then you may continue using a further 2 weeks of olive oil drops.

After 4 weeks if you still feel you have blocked ears then you should arrange an appointment for possible ear syringing with our practice nurse. This should be a routine nurse's appointment, not an urgent one.

If at any time you are experiencing pain, worsening deafness or an unpleasant smelling discharge you should stop using the drops and consult a doctor or nurse at the surgery.