Ear Wax: Your Self-Help Guide.

Earwax:

Earwax is a normal, and forms a protective coating on the skin in the ear canal. The quantity of earwax produced varies greatly from person to person.

Occasionally earwax can accumulate and form a plug in the ear. This is not a serious problem, but may be a nuisance. You only need to remove earwax if it is causing symptoms such as reduced hearing, or when fitting a hearing aid.

If your ears are painful or have fluid coming out of them, or if you have a hole in the ear drum (perforation) or have recently had surgery on your ear you should see a doctor or nurse for ear examination prior to trying the methods outlined below.

How to remove ear wax:

If you think you have ear wax, 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.

Ear drops

Olive oil ear drops are a safe, effective way to clear earwax in most cases. The oil softens the wax so that it runs out, without harming the ear. You will not necessarily see the wax come out.

If prone to repeated wax build up you can use olive oil drops twice a week, long term to prevent recurrence.

If olive oil does not work, you can also try other ear drops, available over the counter from your pharmacist.

How to use ear drops:

- Warm the drops to room temperature before using them
- Put 2 or 3 drops down the ear twice daily.
- Lie with the affected ear uppermost when putting in drops
- Stay like this for 10 minutes to allow the drops to soak into the earwax.

Continue for 2-3 weeks. If the wax has not resolved you may wish to try the following options:

Bulb Syringing

Bulb syringing is a safe, alternate way to remove ear wax. Bulb syringes can be easily purchased from a pharmacy and used at home.

Instructions for Bulb Syringing:

Use olive oil drops twice a day for at least 14 days prior to bulb syringing. Or alternatively use sodium bicarbonate ear drops purchased from your pharmacy (please read the manufacturers leaflet.)

- Wash your hands.
- Use a bowl of cooled, boiled water that is warm to the touch, not too hot or too cold
- Prepare the syringe by squirting water in and out of it into the bowl a few times.
- Gently pull your outer ear "up and out" to help straighten out the canal, which will allow better access for the water
- Tilt your head so the ear to be treated is upmost.

- Place the tip of the syringe into the opening of the ear. Do NOT push the syringe further into the ear. Gently squirt one or more bulb syringes of water into your ear.
- Allow the water to remain in your ear for at least 60 seconds. Gently tilt your head in the opposite direction and wiggle your outer ear

Ear irrigation (ear syringing):

Ear irrigation is only recommended in the rare occasions where ear drops and bulb syringing have not worked.

Ear syringing can lead to ear infections, perforated ear drum and tinnitus (persistent noise) and therefore it is only advised in certain circumstances. If you think you have persisting wax despite taking the above measures please make an appointment with your doctor or nurse to discuss.

We make every effort to ensure the information in these articles is accurate and correct at the date of publication, but it is of necessity of a brief and general nature, and this should not replace your own good clinical judgement, or be regarded as a substitute for taking professional advice in appropriate circumstances.