

Ear Wax Self-Treatment

What is ear wax?

Ear wax is also called cerumen. It is a normal secretion of the ceruminous glands in the outer ear where it provides protection by stopping dust, dirt or foreign bodies entering the ear canal. Wax is slightly acidic, which provides natural protection from infection.

A build-up of wax is more likely to occur in older adults, hearing aid users or people who insert devices into their ears.

Do ears need to be cleaned?

Your ears should be self-cleaning. **DO NOT use cotton buds to try and remove the wax** as this will push the wax further into the ear canal and block your ear. Use of cotton buds can lead to infection and damage the ear.

What can I do if wax is causing a problem?

If you are experiencing ear pain or discharge, please consult your GP.

If you have been told you have excess wax, you may use olive oil drops to encourage the natural movement of wax from the ear canal:

- Apply the drops whilst lying on your side with the affected ear upwards.
- Apply one to two drops into the ear canal and gently massage the area in front of the ear.
- Remain lying on your side for 10 minutes to allow the olive oil to soften the wax.
- After 10 minutes, slowly sit up whilst holding a tissue against your ear to soak up any oil exiting the canal.
- Repeat this procedure for the other ear if required.

An olive oil spray is also available, which avoids the need to lie on your side for 10 minutes. This can be helpful if you find it difficult to lie on one side for prolonged periods.

Olive oil drops and spray can be purchased from the pharmacy or supermarket.

DO NOT use olive oil drops if you have been told you have a perforated ear drum or if you have ever had surgery on your ears. You will need to request your GP refers you for wax microsuction by a specialist.

DO NOT put cotton wool in your ear canal after using the olive oil to retain it, this may cause infection.

Other types of ear drops may be purchased containing sodium bicarbonate or hydrogen peroxide to help break down the wax. Prolonged use of these drops can lead to dryness and irritation of the ear canal, so always follow the recommended use on the packaging. If self-treatment does not remove the wax, you may require ear syringing or microsuction. Contact your GP for advice.

Sources of information

East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust Audiology Department

Tel: 0300 131 5679

Email: audiology@nhs.net

NHS Website: Ear Wax Build-up

www.nhs.uk/conditions/earwax/pages/introduction.aspx

Important information

This patient information is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact the Patient Experience Team – Tel: 0300 131 4731 (direct dial) or by email at: patientexperience@nhs.net

Hand hygiene

The trust is committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

Other formats

If you require any of the Trust leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department.

Tel: 0300 131 4434 Email: esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.

Reference

The following clinicians have been consulted and agreed this patient information:
Ian Woodward (Service Manager), Kate Bull (Clinical Lead)

The Clinical Specialty/Unit that have agreed this patient information leaflet:
Audiology Department

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Responsible clinician/author: Ian Woodward (Service Manager)

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