



Community Care and Treatment Services

Ear Care Clinic

Information for patients

The aim of this leaflet is to give you advice about:

- Ear wax
- What can you do if wax builds up and causes problems?
- Ear drops and how to get them into your ear
 - Removal of ear wax by irrigation (syringing)
- General advice about looking after your ears

- When you should not have your ears syringed
- Who to contact for Appointment

Ear wax is produced inside your ears to keep them clean and free from germs. It usually passes out of the ears harmlessly, but sometimes too much can build up and block the ears. A build-up of earwax is a common problem that can often be treated using eardrops bought from a pharmacy.

What causes earwax to build up?

Some people regularly get blocked ears because they naturally produce a lot of earwax.

Other factors that can increase the risk of too much wax include:

- Producing naturally hard or dry earwax
- Having narrow or hairy ear canals (the tube between the opening of the ear and the eardrum)
- Being elderly, as earwax becomes drier with age.
- Bony growths in the outer part of the ear canal
- Earwax can also block your ear if you frequently insert objects into your ear canal, such as cotton wool buds, ear plugs or hearing aids.

General advice about looking after your ears

***Do not** use cotton wool buds or any other object to clean your ears. This will push the wax or dirt further into the ear, or scratch or damage the ear canal. The ear cleans itself and flakes of wax will fall out now and then.

*** Do not** use corners of towels or cotton wool buds to dry your ear canal. They will dry naturally.

To book an appointment:

Please contact your GP surgery and they will make an appointment for you at one of the Care and Treatment clinics

Symptoms of ear wax buildup

A build up of earwax in your ear can cause:

- Earache
- Hearing loss
- Tinnitus (hearing sounds from inside your body)
- Itchiness in or round the ear
- Vertigo
- Ear infections

These problems will usually improve once the excess earwax has been removed.

Ear Drops alone will often clear a plug of wax. You can buy these drops from pharmacies. For example, sodium bicarbonate, almond oil or olive oil ear drops, all three work as well as each other.

*** Do not use drops if you have a perforated eardrum (hole in your eardrum)**

How to get eardrops into your ear

1. Wash your hands
2. Clean and dry the affected outer ear (gently use a tissue to clean the outer ear)
3. Wash your hands again
4. Warm the drops to body temperature before using them. Put them in your pocket or hold them in your hand for five minutes before using them.
5. Lie on your back
6. Tilt your head so that the affected ear is turned upwards for applying drops
7. Pour 3-4 drops into the affected ear. If possible have a second person put the drops into the ear canal.
8. Apply gentle on and off pressure with your finger to the cartilage at the front of the ear opening for 3 or 4 times. (See diagram).



9. Lie with the affected ear uppermost for 5 minutes, to allow the drops to soak in. The drops soften the wax and it often breaks up and comes out on its own. 3 – 4 drops of chosen drops can be used twice daily for one week.

Information about eardrops

- Keep eardrops in a cool dark place.
- Do not let anyone else use your eardrops or do not use anyone else's eardrops.
- Throw out the bottle (and get a new one if required) after the recommended time (this is usually 4 weeks after opening the bottle). You can write the date you opened the bottle on the label so that you know when to throw it out.

Once you have applied the drops for seven days:

If your symptoms continue:

- Phone your GP surgery and request an appointment at the Care and Treatment Ear Care clinic
- You will be offered the next available appointment at a time and venue that is acceptable to you
- A Nurse will look inside your ears to check if they are blocked
- They may suggest using eardrops for a bit longer or they may carry out ear irrigation

Ear Irrigation

Ear irrigation will usually work if drops have softened the wax

A nurse who is specially trained in ear irrigation will irrigate your ears

Water warmed to body temperature will be squirted in to the ear using a electric ear irrigator

This dislodges the plug of wax which then falls out with the water. Usually ear irrigation is painless, but it can occasionally cause slight itch or discomfort. Rarely ear irrigation can damage the eardrum. Some people may feel dizzy after ear irrigation, but this settles quickly.

Regular or routine ear irrigation is not recommended as it can lead to ear infections, perforated ear drum and tinnitus (persistent noise) and therefore it is only performed in exceptional circumstances.

PREVENTING EARWAX BUILD-UP

Earwax helps protect your ears from dirt and germs.

You can't prevent earwax, but you can keep using ear drops to soften the wax. This will help it fall out on its own and should prevent blocked ears.

Speak to a pharmacist about earwax build-up. They can give advice and suggest treatments.

You should not have your ears irrigated if:

- You have or have had a hole in the ear drum
- Have had an operation on your ear
- Are deaf in the other ear

There may be other reasons you may not be able to have your ears irrigated. The nurse assessing you will discuss any other concerns with you at your appointment..

General advice about looking after your ears:

Do not use cotton buds or any other object to clean your ears. These push the wax further in and can cause irritation. The ear canals clean themselves.

This leaflet has been developed using current medical and nursing literature. Patients, doctors and nurses were involved in the development of the leaflet.