

## What Is Ear Wax and Why Do We Have It?



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Ear wax is normal and forms a protective coating over the skin in the ear canal. Ears are usually self cleaning. Ear wax will normally fall out naturally without you noticing. Jaw movements while talking and eating help to remove the wax. Some people produce excessive ear wax causing a blockage of the ear canal.

You are more likely to develop a blockage if you:

- Use cotton buds to clean your ears, this pushes the wax deeper into the canal
- Have narrow or hairy ear canals
- Wear hearing aids, ear plugs or headphones as these can prevent natural expulsion of the wax
- If you are elderly, ear wax tends to be drier
- If you have a skin problem such as eczema or psoriasis.

## Alternatively

There are now over-the-counter kits available from pharmacies containing wax softener and a small bulb for self irrigation. Although this could be an alternative it is not possible to ascertain if your ears are clear.

With self irrigation the ears cannot be dried which increases the risk of infection. Also undetected diseases may be present and trauma may occur during the procedure.

DO NOT use if you suspect your eardrum is perforated, damaged or infected in any way. It is important that you read the instructions carefully before use.

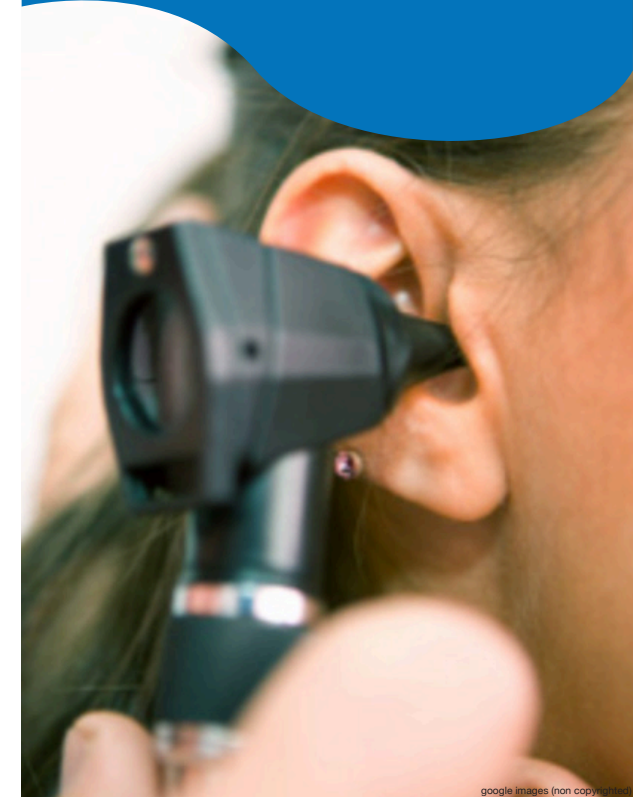
Further information is available from  
[www.earcarecentre.com](http://www.earcarecentre.com)

# Ear Care

A self-care guide

## Remember Your Hearing Is Precious

If you have a problem with your ears,  
don't ignore them.



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## Advice To Help Prevent and Manage Ear Wax

### If You Experience The Following You Should Seek Advice From Your GP Or Nurse Practitioner

- Pain
- Dizziness
- Sudden deafness or buzzing
- Discharge or bleeding from the ear
- Any foreign body in the ear

### If You Think You Have Wax In Your Ears

- Keep your ear canals dry to avoid infection.
- Use ear plugs when you swim.
- Tip your head to get rid of any water that gets into your ear.
- Ear canals are self-cleaning, do not use cotton buds or hair grips to clean or dry your ears. These damage the delicate lining of the canal and could even perforate your eardrum.

## To Treat Impacted Wax

See a GP or nurse to make a diagnosis of impacted wax and to rule out other problems.

### Olive Oil Drops

Room temperature olive oil drops are the treatment of choice because they are safe to use. Other drops can be used but are more likely to irritate your ear canal. Ask your doctor or nurse for advice if you think you have perforated your eardrum.

Put 1-2 drops in the affected ear/ears at night and in the morning for 5-7 days. In most cases the wax will have softened to encourage the wax to come out without other interventions. Do not use for more than 7 days as your ear canal can become too moist. Then stop for 7 days and repeat if necessary.

Buy at a chemist with a dropper bottle or at a supermarket. If you find this difficult, there is also an olive oil spray available to buy from the pharmacy. This could be used instead of a dropper, to avoid having to lie down for 10 minutes. This can be useful for people with poor mobility or children who often will not lie still for a length of time.

## How To Instil Drops

- Lie down with the affected ear upwards.
- Gently pull the outer ear backwards and upwards.
- Using room temperature olive oil and the dropper, drop 1-2 drops in the ear canal and gently massage the area in front of the ear.
- Remain lying down for approximately 10 minutes. When you sit up, wipe away any excess oil.
- Do not put any cotton wool in your ear canal as this will absorb the oil.
- Repeat the procedure with the opposite ear if necessary.

### If You Have Recurrent Skin Problems And Wax Build Up

Use 1-2 drops of oil no more than once or twice a month to improve the skin cells and help prevent future wax build up.

## Ear Irrigation At Your Surgery

This is usually only considered if the above recommendations have been unsuccessful.

Ear wax needs to be softened for 3-7 days before syringing is attempted. Olive oil is the preferred choice of softener but other softeners could be used pre-irrigation.