



Advice on Ear Wax and Hearing Aid Use

Common myths about ear wax

Myth: "Ears need to be cleaned regularly to keep healthy"

Ear wax is not a problem unless it builds up and blocks the ear canal. A build-up of ear wax has nothing to do with poor hygiene. The primary function of ear wax is to protect the ear canal. It does this in several ways:

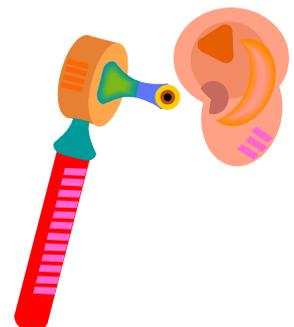
- Ear wax helps your ears to self-clean themselves as it traps dirt and dead skin cells and slowly moves out of your ear
- Ear wax lubricates the ear canal to prevent the skin from drying out, cracking and itching
- The acidity of ear wax gives it anti-bacterial and anti-fungal properties

Myth: "Wearing a hearing aid increases the production of ear wax"

Wearing a hearing aid regularly does not cause increased production of ear wax but it may make you prone to a build-up of wax as the ear mould stops the wax getting out of the ear.

Recommendations

- Use a damp flannel to clean the outer ear
- If you suffer from outer ear infection, have a perforated ear drum or have had previous ear surgery, keep your ears dry when washing your hair, showering or swimming. This can be achieved by using earplugs or cotton wool smeared with Vaseline.
- If you think your ear is blocked with wax, make an appointment with a practice nurse at your doctor's surgery to have your ears checked. The nurse will be able to tell you what needs to be done if your ears are blocked.
- It is important that your ears are clear of wax before you visit the hospital for a hearing test or hearing aid fitting. Consider visiting your practice nurse to check for wax one month before your hospital appointment.
- Clean your ear mould on a regular basis to keep it free of wax



How to use olive oil drops



1. Lie down on your side with the ear requiring drops facing upwards
2. Pull the outer ear backwards and upwards (just backwards in children)
3. Drop 2 or 3 drops of oil, at room temperature, into the ear canal and then massage the skin just in front of the entrance to the ear canal to enable the oil to run down the ear canal more easily
4. Stay lying down for 5-10 minutes and then get up and wipe away any excess oil with a tissue
5. DO NOT put cotton wool in the ear following the drops as this absorbs the oil and prevents the wax coming out
6. Repeat the procedure with the opposite ear if required.

You can buy a dropper or pre-measured capsules of olive oil from the chemist if you find this easier.

Repeat this procedure for five to seven nights before attending an appointment for wax removal to enable the doctor or nurse to remove the wax easily.

If you suffer from excessive wax, you can use olive oil drops on a regular basis (once a week) to prevent the build up of wax and to help the ear clean itself.

What NOT to do

- Do not clean your ears with cotton buds, hairgrips, matches etc. These may damage the delicate lining of your ear canal, introduce infection or pierce your ear drum. In addition, they can push the wax further into your ear canal where it becomes impacted and cannot work its way out
- Do not scratch your ears as this may cause and help spread infection
- Do not use ear candles – they are not effective at removing earwax and may result in serious injury
- If you suffer from outer ear infections, have a perforated ear drum or have had previous ear surgery, you should never have your ears syringed