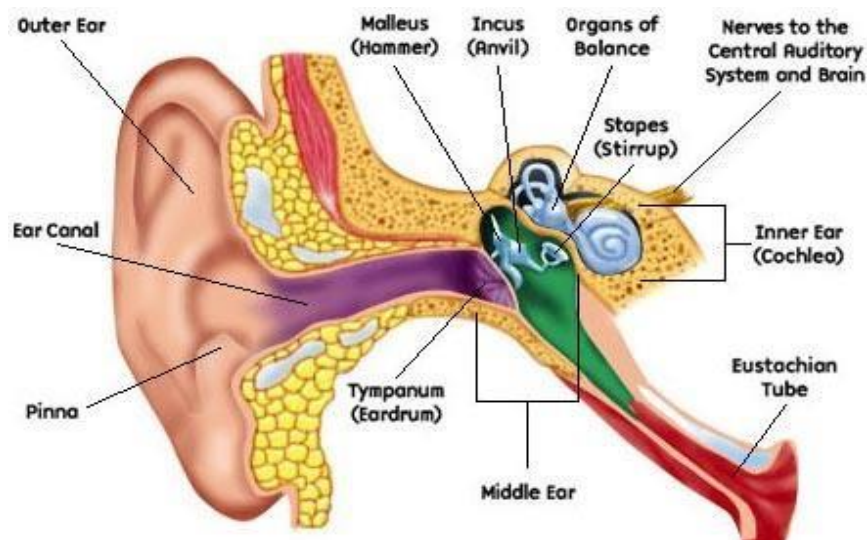


# Ear Care: Ear Wax Patient Leaflet



## What is ear wax?

Ear wax is normal and is produced to form a protective coating over the skin in the ear canal.

Ears are normally self-cleaning – the movement of your jaw whilst eating and talking helps to move the wax along the canal where it will usually fall out naturally without you noticing.

## Why is my ear blocked with wax?

The amount of ear wax produced varies from person to person.

You are more likely to develop a blockage of wax in the canal if you:

- Use cotton buds to clean the ear as this pushes the wax deeper into the canal.
- Wear a hearing aid, ear plugs or use in-ear speakers, as these can all interfere with the natural process of wax expulsion.
- Have abnormally narrow ear canals
- Have a particularly hairy ear canal
- Are elderly – because the ear wax you produce is drier and harder.
- Have a dry skin problem such as eczema or psoriasis. Keeping your ears dry will improve this condition. The easiest way to keep ears dry when bathing/showering is by using a small piece of cottonwool smeared in Vaseline jelly.

## Advice to help you manage and prevent ear wax blockage

Ear wax only becomes a problem if it causes deafness or discomfort, or if your health professional requires a clear view of your ear drum.

If you experience any of the following, you should seek advice from the nurse or GP:

- Pain
- Discharge or bleeding from the ear
- Sudden deafness or buzzing
- Foreign bodies in the ear
- Dizziness or balance problems

# Ear Care: Ear Wax Patient Leaflet

If you are not experiencing any of the above, we recommend that you manage the blockage as follows:

## Olive Oil drops

The following needs to be done 2-3 times daily for *at least* 14 days.

- Lie on your side with the affected ear uppermost
- Pull the outer ear gently backwards and upwards to straighten the ear canal
- Put 2-3 drops of olive oil into the affected ear and gently massage just in front of the ear
- Stay lying on your side to allow the wax to soak in for around 5 minutes
- Afterwards, wipe away any excess oil but do not plug your ear with cotton wool as this simply absorbs the oil

Your hearing problem may initially worsen after first starting to use olive oil so we advise you to concentrate on treating one ear at a time if both ears are blocked with wax.

## And if that doesn't work...

In most cases after 14 days the wax will have softened sufficiently to encourage the wax to come out without further intervention. If not, you should continue to put three or four drops of ordinary olive oil, two or three times a day **for 8 weeks**. Do not use cotton wool as it only soaks up the olive oil. This softens the wax so that it then runs out of its own accord. It does not harm the ear. You can continue for any length of time. Surprisingly, you will not necessarily see the wax come out. It often seems to come out unnoticed.

For every 2 weeks of use of drop use, there is a 50/50 chance of shifting impacted wax. For every 2 weeks with a different agent, for example Olive oil for 2 weeks, then Sodium Bicarbonate for 2 weeks, there is an extra 50% chance of clearing obstructing ear wax. **After 8 weeks of usage, almost all problematic ear wax is cleared with the use of drops alone.**

Please note that the use of Sodium Bicarbonate for more than 2 weeks at a time can create a habitable environment for bugs to grow, therefore increasing the risk of an ear infection.

If your ears are regularly becoming blocked with wax, after cleaning the blockage we will usually suggest you use olive oil drops as above around once per week to keep the wax soft and encourage the natural process of wax expulsion.

Please note that ear syringing is no longer recommended as a method for treating ear wax, due to the potential risk of complications.

If at this stage you are still experiencing difficulties, speak to a clinician. Assuming wax is still the problem, you may need to be referred to a specialist clinic for wax removal. Unfortunately, there will be a wait for this service. Private "microsuction" services are available, but always ensure you attend a reputable and safe service.