

Blocked ears (wax) self-care guidelines for patients

Earwax:

Earwax is a normal build-up of dead cells, hair, foreign material such as dust, and natural wax which forms a protective coating on the skin in the ear canal. The quantity of earwax produced varies greatly from person to person.

A doctor or nurse can look into the ear canal and confirm a plug of earwax has formed. A plug of earwax is not a serious problem, more a nuisance. You only need to remove earwax if it is causing symptoms such as dulled hearing or when fitting a hearing aid.

How to remove Ear wax:

Note: If you think you have ear wax, do not try to clean the ear canal with cotton wool buds. This can make things worse, as you will push some earwax deeper inside. It may also cause an ear infection.

Ear drops:

Ear drops alone will clear a plug of earwax in most cases. You can buy sodium bicarbonate drops from pharmacies. Put 2 or 3 drops down the ear 2 or 3 times a day for 2-3 weeks. This softens the wax so that it then runs out of its own accord without harming the ear. You can continue for any length of time, but 3 weeks is usually enough. Surprisingly, you will not necessarily see wax come out. It often seems to come out unnoticed.

If you are prone to repeated wax built up you can continue to use drops twice a week to prevent recurrence.

How to use ear drops:

1. Warm the drops to room temperature before using them
2. Pour a few drops into the affected ear
3. Lie with the affected ear uppermost when putting in drops
4. Stay like this for 10 minutes to allow the drops to soak into the earwax.

Ear irrigation (ear syringing):

Ear irrigation is only recommended in the rare occasions where ear drops and bulb syringing has failed to work. Ear syringing can lead to ear infections, perforated ear drum and tinnitus (persistent noise) and therefore it is only performed in exceptional circumstances. If you think you have persisting wax despite taking the above measures please make an appointment with your doctor or nurse to discuss.