

Eax Wax Advice

We have had to make the hard decision to temporarily adapt our procedures for ear irrigation. This is owing to a huge increase in demand to continue to deliver safe clinical care in all other areas of healthcare.

Ear irrigation has been withdrawn from many other surgeries for the same reason. There is evidence that self-care guidelines work for a significant number of patients with problematic ear wax.

Please note that self-care measures should not be undertaken in the following circumstances and advice should be sought from the GP surgery or pharmacist.

- New dizziness
- Ear pain
- Previous ear drum perforation
- Recent or current ear infection (symptoms are usually pain and/or discharge)
- If you have only one hearing ear which is the affected ear

Self-care guidelines for patients

Ear wax:

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. Put 2 or 3 drops of ordinary olive oil 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 olive oil drops twice a week to prevent recurrence.

If olive oil does not work you can buy sodium bicarbonate drops from pharmacies.

How to use ear drops:

- Warm the drops to room temperature before using drops
- Pour a few drops into the affected ear
- Lie with the affected ear uppermost when putting in drops
- Stay like this for 10 minutes to allow the drops to soak into the ear

Bulb Syringing:

Bulb syringing is a safe, alternate way to remove ear wax. Bulb syringes can be easily purchased from a pharmacy and allow you to clear your ears from wax in your own home.

If your ears are painful or have fluid coming out of them, or if you have a hole in their ear drum (perforation) or have recently had surgery on your ear you should see a doctor or nurse and don't use this method.

Instructions for Bulb Syringing:

Use olive oil drops twice a day for at least 14 days prior to bulb syringing (read the information leaflet with the bulb syringe). Or alternatively use sodium bicarbonate ear drops purchased from your pharmacy (please read the manufacturers leaflet.)

- Wash your hands
- Use a bowl of cooled, boiled water that is warm to the touch, not too hot or too cold.
- Prepare the syringe by squirting water in and out of it a few times.
- Gently pull your outer ear "up and out" to help straighten out the canal, which will allow better access for the water.
- Tilt your head with the effected ear uppermost.
- Place the tip of the syringe into the opening of the ear. **Do NOT** push the syringe further into the ear. Gently squirt one or more bulb syringes of water into your ear. (This might be best done in the shower/bath so that the excess water will run into the bathtub and not on your floor)
- Allow the water to remain in your ear for at least 60 seconds. Gently tilt your head in the opposite direction and wiggle your outer ear.

If, after 3 weeks or more, you are still deaf from wax, you will need to make an appointment with a doctor or nurse to decide what should be done.

Ear micro-suction

In a few cases, ear wax will continue to be problematic despite self-care measures. In this case once ear wax is softened using the above self-care techniques, or if you have a previous ear perforation/single working ear only, micro-suction is a safe and effective procedure for removal of ear wax. This can be undertaken at specialist private clinics, for example:

- Specsavers (Scarborough)
- Interhearing (Pickering)

There will be other private providers and these can be found via the internet.

Should you not wish to proceed with one of the above private options then please contact the surgery as a referral to NHS services can be made as an alternative.

Ear irrigation (ear syringing):

Ear irrigation is only recommended in rare occasions when self-care has failed to work. It should be noted that 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 or feel that you are unable to undertake the above measures, please make an appointment with your doctor or nurse to discuss .