

## Managing Ear Wax

Ear wax is a normal mechanism produced within the ear, forming from a build-up of dead cells, irritants such as dust and Cerumen (natural wax produced by glands within the ear).

Normally ear wax will fall out of the ear independently and doesn't need removing. However, the quantity of earwax produced varies within individuals and wax can sometimes build up and block the ear canal. Symptoms of your ears being blocked with wax are:

- **Loss of hearing/ fullness within the ear**
- **Earache/ discomfort**
- **Dizziness**
- **Itching to ears**

## Treating ear wax yourself

If you have any of the above symptoms from earwax build-up, ear drops will often clear the wax.

By using **2-3 drops of Olive or Almond oil twice daily for 3-7 days**, the wax will usually soften, break up and fall out of the ear.

The correct procedure to follow for administration of the ear drops is:

- Warm the drops to room temperature
- Administer 2-3 drops into the affected ear
- Lie with the affected ear uppermost and stay like this for a few minutes to allow the drops to soak into the wax

If for any reason you are not able to use the above drops speak to a pharmacist, who will be able to advise you about alternative drops and treatments.

## Ear irrigation (Syringing)

If you have followed the above advice and you still have symptoms of earwax, then you may need to arrange an appointment here at the surgery for ear irrigation to remove the wax. This procedure entails irrigating the ear canal with warm water to clear the wax.

In order for us to complete ear irrigation, you must have softened the wax with drops first. To soften the wax, you need to apply **2-3 drops, twice daily for a further 3-5 days**. If you have not put any drops in at this point, please ensure you have applied the drops for **7-14** days prior to your arranged appointment.

Failure to do this may result in the wax being too hard to perform the procedure and repeat appointments being necessary.

**Boughton Health Centre (January 2018)**

Please be aware that ear irrigation does have some rare risks associated with it, including damage to the ear drum, ear canal and infection.

Additionally, it is not advised if you have or have had any of the following:

- Previous ear drum perforation
- Ear infection in the last 6 weeks
- Pain in the ears
- Cleft palate (even if you have had it repaired)
- Ear surgery or grommets/ T-tube
- Discharge from the ear
- Previous problems with ear irrigation (syringing)
- Under 18 years of age

If ear irrigation is unsuccessful or not suitable, you may be referred to an ear specialist for removal of earwax.

## **Can earwax build-up be prevented?**

Some people experience recurring build-up of earwax. To try and prevent earwax building up and blocking the ear canal, you may use ear drops regularly.

It is not clear if this will prevent a build-up of ear wax and there is no clear guidance available on how frequently ear drops should be applied; the evidence available for this suggests a variation from daily applications to once every 2 weeks.

However, you may wish to try this if you are regularly troubled by earwax to see if this helps to prevent the problem.

**You should never use cotton buds, hair grips or other objects inside the ear to try and get rid of ear wax yourself. This can push the wax further in, damage to ear drum or cause infections by damaging the delicate skin of the ear canal.**

References used for information leaflet:

NICE (2016)

NHS Choices

Patient UK

IF YOU HAVE ANY CONCERNS REGARDING YOUR EAR SYMPTOMS OR THINK YOU MAY HAVE ANY COMPLICATIONS AFTER EAR IRRIGATION, PLEASE CONTACT THE PRACTICE AND A GP OR NURSE CAN HELP.