



The Alresford Surgery

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EAR WAX ADVICE

Ear Wax

- Ear wax is normal; it provides protection for your ears.
- The ears are usually self-cleaning as the skin cells of the ear drum and ear canal are constantly migrating outwards and most people do not need to interfere with their ears at all.
- The movement of your jaw while eating and talking moves the wax along the canal.
- Ear wax only becomes a problem if it causes deafness, pain or if a health professional needs a clear view of the ear drum.

What makes ear wax worse?

- The amount of wax produced varies from person to person.
- Some people produce excessive amounts of wax and this can block the ear canal.
- Wearing a hearing aid/ear plugs and or/ head phones can interfere with wax expulsion.
- Narrow and or hairy ear canals.
- If you are elderly – the wax produced may be harder and drier.
- Dry skin in people who suffer with eczema or psoriasis.

What you shouldn't do, some suggestions!

- **Do not use cotton buds or any other objects to clean the ear or remove wax.** This forces the wax deeper into the canal and can cause damage, injury and possible infection. .
- If your ears are itchy do not scratch or rub them with your finger nails or any other objects
- Do not use anything smaller than your elbow in your ear!!

What helps?

- Try and keep your ears dry. When washing your hair, showering or swimming either use ear plugs or put some Vaseline on a piece of cotton wool, roll it into a bullet shape and place in the ear, then removed and throw away after use.
- Don't put your head under the water when bathing
- If you regularly get blocked ears, use olive oil drops weekly

When to see the GP or Advanced Nurse Practitioner

If you are experiencing the following symptoms:

- Pain
- Discharge or bleeding from the ear
- Sudden deafness
- Dizziness
- Foreign bodies (you may be advised to attend A&E)

What you can do to manage the problem?

If you are not experiencing any of the symptoms above, the following is recommended:



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- Olive Oil Drops/Spray or sodium bicarbonate drops are used to soften the wax, which may fall away from the ear or dissolve. It is recommended that this is done twice daily for between 1-3 weeks, depending on instructions on the packet and the pharmacist advice.

How to apply the ear drops

1. Lie on your side with the affected ear uppermost, pulling the outer ear gently backwards and upwards to straighten the ear canal
2. Put 2-3 drops into the affected ear(s) and gently massage just in front of the ear
3. Stay lying on your side for up to 10 minutes to allow the wax to soak up the oil
4. Afterwards, wipe away any excess oil but do not plug your ear with cotton wool as this simply absorbs the oil
5. Your hearing problem may initially worsen after first starting to use the olive oil drops; this is why you are advised to concentrate on treating one ear at a time if both ears are blocked with wax.
6. In most cases, the wax will have softened sufficiently to encourage the wax to come out without further intervention.
7. However, if you feel your hearing is still impaired, please make an appointment with the nurse for further advice and management.

DO NOT use olive oil or sodium bicarbonate drops if you have been told you have a perforated ear drum or if you have ever had surgery on your ears.

DO NOT put cotton wool in your ear canal after using the olive oil to retain it, this may cause infection.

Self-Treatment of Ear Wax with the Bulb Syringe

If the one or both ears remain blocked with wax after the recommended drops then an ear bulb syringe can be used to self-treat the problem using gentle water irrigation. This is a small bulb shaped rubber object that will fill with warm water and allow the user to squirt the water gently into the ear to remove earwax. You can buy it from most pharmacies or on-line. It costs about £6. It can be re-used and performed at home. You can purchase versions suitable for adults and children.

Is it safe and what are the risks of using a bulb syringe?

The use of the bulb syringe is commonly used in the USA and Europe and widely across the UK. Two studies have concluded that the ear bulb is safe and effective in treating ear wax. A study on the use of the bulb syringe showed that half of patients who use it are successfully treated.

The risks of using the bulb syringe include failure to remove the wax, ear infection and ear drum perforation, but these risks are low.

When should a bulb syringe not be used?

Do not use a bulb syringe in the following circumstances:

- Pain in the ear or any bleeding.



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- Patients who are immunocompromised or at risk of infection.
- A history of ear drum perforation in the affected ear.
- A recent history of an ear infection in the affected ear.
- Symptoms of Infection in the ear usually pain or a smelly discharge
- If you have an offensive discharge from the ear this may mean you have an infection in the ear.
- If you only have one hearing ear which is the affected ear.
- Previous ear surgery on the affected ear
- In the above circumstances make an appointment to see your nurse or GP to have your ears examined and appropriately treated.

How to use the ear bulb syringe :

Ensure you have followed the advice regarding using ear drops to soften the wax first.

1. Wash your hands. Then put some clean warm (not hot) water in a bowl. Squirt the bulb syringe in the water a few times to fill it up with the warm water.
2. Hold your head to one side so the affected ear is facing upwards. You can do this in the shower or bath or lie on the bed with a towel underneath your head.
3. If you experience any pain during or before this procedure stop immediately and see your nurse or GP for a review.
4. Gently pull your ear in an upward and outwards direction so that the water gets better access to the ear canal. Hold the nozzle inside the ear canal (not too deeply) and GENTLY squirt the water from the bulb syringe into the ear. You can gently squirt more bulb syringes into the ear if required. Leave the water in your ear for 1-3 minutes to soften the wax.
5. Now tilt your head over the sink so the water can fall out. Wiggle the outer part of the ear to help the water and wax come out. You can repeat the procedure if required.
6. Repeat for the other ear if both ears are affected.
7. If you get any pain, ear discharge or if the procedure is unsuccessful, or is after 2 weeks you are still deaf contact your nurse or doctor for advice.

Ear Irrigation

Ear syringing is currently not being performed in General Practice due to this being an aerosol generating procedure which has been identified as a risk of spreading Covid-19.

Ongoing self-care

If your ears are regularly becoming blocked with wax, after clearing the blockage, it is suggested that you use olive oil drops as above around once a week to keep the wax soft and encourage the natural process of wax expulsion.