

# Advice on earwax management

Department of Ear, Nose & Throat

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Information for Patients

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## What is earwax?

Earwax is a natural material made by glands inside the ear canal. It cleans and protects the lining of the ear by trapping dirt and repelling water.

Earwax is also slightly acidic and has antibacterial properties.

Without earwax the skin inside your ear would become dry, cracked, infected or waterlogged and sore. Earwax can be wet or dry, hard or soft.

## What are the signs of having too much earwax?

Signs of excessive earwax build-up include:

- Sudden or partial hearing loss (this is usually temporary)
- A ringing or buzzing in your ear/s or head (Tinnitus)
- A feeling of 'fullness' in the ear
- Earache

## What problems can having too much earwax cause?

Excessive earwax buildup can lead to infection. Contact your doctor if you have symptoms of infection, such as:

- Severe pain in your ear or pain that does not go away.
- Discharge from your ear
- Hearing loss that lasts a long time
- Odor coming from your ear
- Dizziness or vertigo

**Health information and support is available at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

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## What problems can earwax cause for hearing aids?

- Excessive wax can cause the hearing aid to 'feedback' - which is the whistling sound you may hear
- If wax is hard and blocking the ear canal, you may not be hearing at your best.

## Impression taking for earmoulds

To take an impression of your ear we need to have a good view of your ear drum. If we cannot get a good view, we do not know what is behind the wax so taking an impression may push it further down the ear canal. This could cause more problems such as damage to the eardrum (such as perforations).

## How should I remove the earwax?

**Please do not attempt to clean your ears with cotton buds as this will only push the wax further in and may risk injury**

**If you have a history of ear problems, such as repeated infections, a hole or tear (perforation) in your eardrum or ear surgery, you should get advice from your GP, pharmacist or ENT consultant first. After this you can talk to your Audiologist or Nurse Practitioner about what can be done to have the wax removed.**

If you do not have a history of ear problems please follow the steps below recommended by the Ear Nose and Throat Consultant.

If you have any pain, dizziness, discharge, bleeding from the ear, sudden deafness or buzzing, or objects in the ear such as a cotton bud or part of a hearing aid you should speak to your GP or Nurse Practitioner before trying to remove anything yourself.

1. Put 2-3 drops of olive oil in the ear canal/s that have too much earwax. The oil will help soften the wax.
  - You can buy a dropper from your local Chemist.
  - The oil should be at room temperature (but can be gently warmed by placing the bottle of oil in some warm water for a few minutes)
  - Put the drops in (if possible) whilst lying on your side. Pull your ear back gently to open the ear canal. Lie on your side for 5 to 10minutes. Ideally this should be done last thing at night. Do not use cotton wool to hold the oil in the ear.
2. Continue with the olive oil drops at least once a day, for a period of **2** weeks, then have your ears re-examined.
3. If wax is still a problem, stop using olive oil and switch to sodium bicarbonate drops (available from your local chemist / pharmacy) for up to 2 days.
4. Have your ears re-examined after trying these steps.

**If the wax is still a problem speak to your GP first. They can arrange to have the wax cleared out.**

**Source: NHS Choices <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Earwax/Pages/Introduction.aspx>**



## Contact details

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