

Earwax build up: Your self-help guide

Information for patients

This sheet answers common questions about earwax build up. If you would like further information, or have any particular worries, please do not hesitate to ask your audiology clinician.

What is earwax?

Earwax is normal and forms a protective coating on the skin in the ear canal. The amount of earwax produced varies greatly from person to person.

Occasionally earwax can build up and cause a blockage in the ear. This is not a serious problem but may be a nuisance. You only need to remove earwax if it is causing problems such as reduced hearing or if it is interfering with your hearing aid(s).

Removal of earwax prior to an appointment

Please ensure that your ears are free of wax prior to any audiology appointment by consulting with your GP. The appointment may not be able to be completed in its entirety if your ear(s) are blocked with wax.

What you can do at home to help with the removal of earwax

If your ears are:

- Painful
- Have fluid coming out of them
- Perforated (if you have a hole in the ear drum)

Or you have recently undergone ear surgery, you must consult with your GP prior to trying the method outlined below:

Olive-oil ear drops

Olive-oil ear drops are a safe, effective way to clear earwax in most cases. The oil softens the wax so that it runs out of the ear without causing harm. You can get these ear drops from your local pharmacist.

If you are someone who is prone to repeated wax build up then you can use olive oil drops twice a week, long term to prevent recurrence.

If olive oil does not work, you can also try other ear drops, available over the counter from your pharmacist. Please ask your pharmacist for advice.

How to use ear drops:

- Lie on your bed with the affected ear upper-most
- Use the pipette so it holds a small amount of the olive oil
- Put 2 or 3 drops down the ear
- Stay lying down for 10 minutes to allow the drops to soak into the wax
- Perform this twice a day, usually once first thing in the morning and once last thing at night
- Continue this for 2 to 3 weeks
- If the problem persists then contact your GP for further advice
- Your audiologist can provide a directory of private wax removal services.

Important

Please do not try to clean your ear canal(s) with cotton buds. This can make things worse, as you can accidentally push earwax deeper down into your ear canal(s). This can potentially permanently damage your ears.

Do you have any further questions?

If you have any further questions, please contact the audiology department on **020 8375 1117** or email: rf-tr.audiologyadmin@nhs.net

More information

For more information about the audiology service at the Royal Free London, please visit our website: www.royalfree.nhs.uk/audiology

Your feedback

If you have any feedback on this leaflet or for a list of references for it, please email: rf.communications@nhs.net

Alternative formats

This leaflet is also available in large print. If you need this leaflet in another format – for example Braille, a language other than English or audio – please speak to a member of staff.

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