

Ear Wax

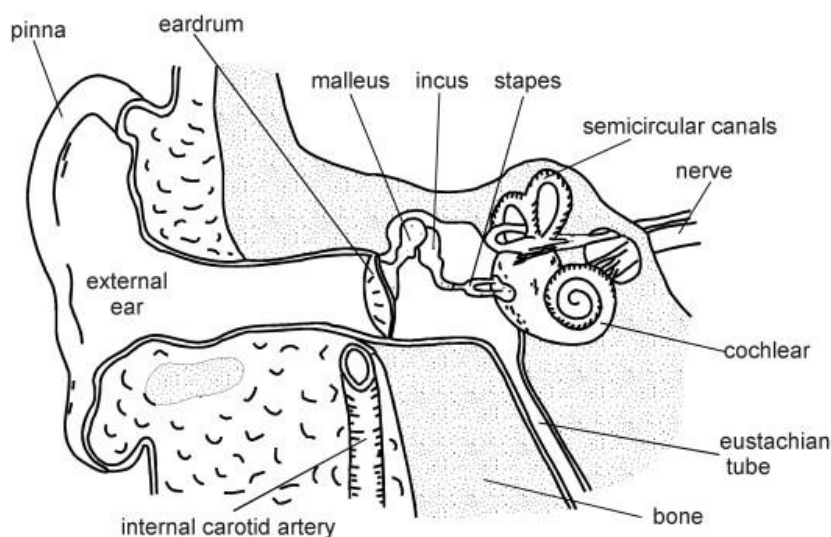
Ear wax is normal and has several functions:

- It cleans, lubricates, and protects the lining of the ear canal, trapping dirt and repelling water.
- It is mildly acidic and has antibacterial properties.

Ears are normally self-cleaning. The movement of your jaw whilst eating and talking helps to move the wax along the canal where it will normally fall out. Ear wax may be wet, dry or flaky. The amount produced varies from person to person.

People are at risk of having a blockage of wax if they:

- Have narrow or deformed ear canals
- Have numerous hairs in their ear canals
- Have dry skin problems such as eczema or psoriasis
- Produce hard or drier wax
- Are elderly - as a person ages the earwax becomes drier
- Wear a hearing aid or ear plugs as these prevent the wax being excreted from the ear.
- Use cotton buds as these push the earwax deeper into the canal
- Have learning disabilities – the reason is unknown



CROSS SECTION OF THE EAR

Ear wax only becomes a problem if it causes deafness or discomfort.

What to do about a build-up of ear wax

Olive Oil (from pharmacy)

- This softens wax.
- It is more gentle & soothing so preferable for those with underlying eczema of the external ears or an unknown perforation.
- Lie down on your side with the affected ear uppermost.
- Instil 4-5 drops in the ear and leave it for 5 minutes.
- Do this twice daily for at least one week
- Your hearing may temporarily worsen as the wax expands and then dissolves. You may not be aware that the wax is dissolving
- If the blockage has not cleared, make an appointment for irrigation.

Ear Irrigation

It is not safe to irrigate if the ear drum is visible or the wax has not been softened.

Ear irrigation is usually painless and involves squirting warm tap water under controlled pressure into your ear. Some people can feel dizzy after ear irrigation, but this usually settles quickly. Occasionally, some people develop an inflammation/infection of the ear canal. Rarely ear irrigation can cause damage to the ear drum.

Prior to irrigation, **instil olive oil drops twice daily for at least 7 days** (see above). It is often easier to treat one ear at a time.

Please note: instilling olive oil might loosen/liquefy or dislodge the wax so that irrigation is not needed, however you will not know this until you have had an ear appointment with one of our team. Irrigation will not be carried out if your ear drum is visible.

After Ear Irrigation

The ear canal may be vulnerable to infection after irrigation. This is caused by removal of all the wax, which has inherent protective properties for the ear canal. Until the ear produces more wax to protect the canal keep the ear(s) dry from entry of water for a minimum of 48 hours after irrigation. If you get soreness of the ear canal you can purchase Earcalm Spray from the pharmacy, and if it doesn't improve or gets worse, please contact your GP.

Maintenance

Try using an olive oil once weekly to prevent wax build-up of wax on a long-term basis after it has been removed.