How to remove earwax

Note: Do not clean inside your ear canal with cotton buds.

Cotton buds can push earwax deeper into the ear canal, making blockage worse. This may cause temporary hearing loss and increase the risk of irritation or infection.

Using olive oil ear drops

Olive oil ear drops can help soften earwax and allow most blockages to clear naturally.

1. Warm the ear drops before use by placing it in your pocket for about 10 minutes, so it reaches body temperature.
2. Lie on your side with the affected ear facing upwards.
3. Gently pull the outer ear backwards and upwards to help straighten the ear canal.
4. Place two to three drops of olive oil into the affected ear, then gently massage around the ear.
5. Remain in this position for five to ten minutes to allow the oil to soak into and soften the earwax.

Afterwards, wipe away any excess oil but do not plug your ear with cotton wool as this simply absorbs the oil.

In most cases, after 14 days, the wax will have softened sufficiently to encourage the wax to come out without further intervention.

Your hearing may feel slightly worse at first after starting olive oil drops. For this reason, if both ears are blocked, it is best to treat one ear at a time.

Alternatively, there are now a number of over-the-counter kits available from pharmacies. These contain a wax softener as drops which you use for 3-4 days and a small bulb syringe to enable you to remove the wax from your ear canals yourself.

They can easily be purchased from your pharmacy or online by searching for 'ear bulb syringe' e.g. Aculife Bulb Ear Syringe, Otex Express Combi pack, or Macks Wax Away Earwax Removal System.

The specially designed ear syringes are designed to create enough pressure to clear wax out of the ear without causing damage to the eardrum. It is very important to use hand-temperature, tepid body temperature water for this process having used olive oil or the drops in the previous days.

Prolonged use of the drops in the over-the-counter preparations other than olive oil can cause irritation and soreness and should not be used for more than a few days at a time.

Ear Syringing is NOT commissioned as an NHS service available at your GP Practice or via the Maidenhead Primary Care Network. As such, Maidenhead PCN no longer provides earwax removal services at St Mark's Hospital. If you want earwax removal using microsuction, you may need to arrange this privately. If you are experiencing hearing difficulties, local audiology services are available locally through providers such as Specsavers and Scrivens.

If you have been referred to audiology and require the removal of ear wax as part of a hearing test then they will be able to arrange this for you.

For further information visit
www.nhs.uk/conditions/earwax-build-up



Ear Care

If there is a build-up of wax in your ear(s) please read the following self-help guide as you may not need an appointment.

MAIDENHEAD PRIMARY CARE NETWORK

What is earwax?

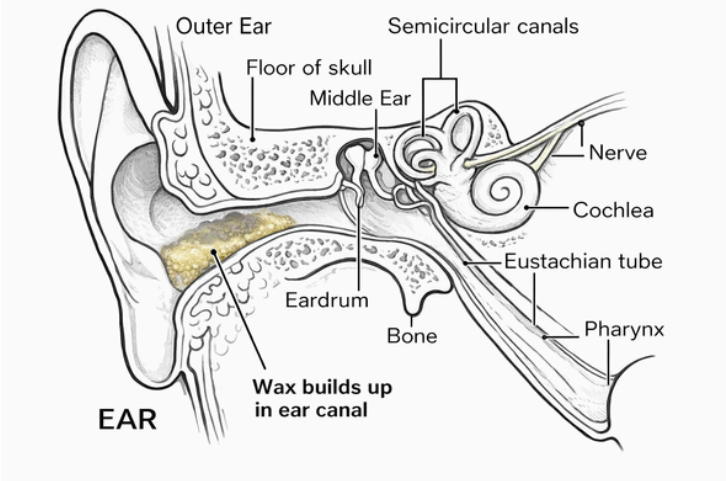
Earwax is normal and is produced to form a protective coating over the skin in the ear canal.

Ears are normally self-cleaning. The skin and tiny hairs in your ear canal act like a conveyor belt, moving wax and debris outwards naturally without you noticing.

This action is helped by the movement of your jaw when you chew and talk.

Experiencing an earwax blockage can be a nuisance but isn't a serious problem.

Ear syringing or irrigation is no longer routinely recommended as a method for treating earwax, due to the potential risk of complications.



Why is my ear blocked with wax?

The amount of earwax produced varies from person to person; some people produce excessive amounts which can lead to a blockage in the ear canal.

You are more likely to develop a blockage of wax in the canal if you:

- use cotton ear buds to clean the ear as this pushes the wax deeper into the canal
- wear a hearing aid, ear plugs or use in-ear speakers for iPods or similar - as these can all interfere with the natural process of wax expulsion
- have abnormally narrow ear canals
- have a particularly hairy ear canal
- are elderly – because the ear wax you produce is drier and harder
- have a dry skin problem such as eczema or psoriasis



Keeping your ears dry when bathing or showering will help:
Use good quality cotton wool smeared in Vaseline/petroleum jelly and insert into the outer shell of the ear before bathing.

How to manage and prevent earwax blockage

Earwax only becomes a problem if it causes deafness or discomfort, or if your health professional needs to have a clear view of your eardrum.

If you experience any of the following symptoms, seek advice from a healthcare professional:

- **Pain discharge or bleeding from your ear**
- **Sudden deafness or ringing in the ear**
- **Dizziness**

