



Blocked ears (wax) self-care guidelines for patients

Ear wax:

Ear wax is a normal build-up of dead cells, hair, and foreign material such as dust, and natural wax which forms a protective coating on the skin in the ear canal.

A doctor or nurse can look into the ear canal and confirm a plug of wax has formed. A plug of wax is not a serious problem, more a nuisance. You only need to remove ear wax if it is causing symptoms such as dulled hearing or when fitting a hearing aid.

If you have history of ear infections please make an appointment with a nurse or GP as you may require specialist treatment.

How to remove ear wax:

If you think you have ear wax, **DO NOT** try to clean the ear canal with cotton wool buds or any other implement. This can make things worse, as you may push wax deeper inside the ear canal. It may also cause an ear infection.

Ear drops:

Ear drops alone will clear a plug of ear wax in most cases. Put 2 or 3 drops of ordinary olive oil down the ear 2 or 3 times a day for 2-3 weeks. This softens the wax so that it then runs out of its own accord without harming the ear. You can continue for any length of time, but 3 weeks is usually enough. Surprisingly, you will not necessarily see wax come out. It often seems to come out unnoticed. If you are prone to repeated wax built up you can continue to use olive oil drops twice a week to prevent recurrence.

If olive oil does not work you can try sodium bicarbonate drops or other over-the-counter products, available from most pharmacies. (Please read the manufacturer's leaflet.).

How to use ear drops:

1. Warm the drops to room temperature before using them
2. Pour a few drops into the affected ear
3. Lie with the affected ear uppermost when putting in drops
4. Stay like this for 10 minutes to allow the drops to soak into the earwax.

Bulb syringing:

Bulb syringing is a safe, alternate way to remove ear wax. Bulb syringes can be easily purchased from a pharmacy and allow you to clear your ears from wax in your own home. **If your ears are painful or have fluid coming out of them, or if you have a hole in your ear drum (perforation), or have recently had**

surgery on your ear, you should not use this method but contact the surgery for advice.

Use olive oil drops twice a day for at least 14 days prior to bulb syringing. Or alternatively use sodium bicarbonate ear drops obtainable from your pharmacy (see above).

1. Wash your hands.
2. Use a bowl of cooled, boiled water that is warm to the touch, not too hot or too cold.
3. Prepare the syringe by squirting water in and out of it a few times.
4. Gently pull your outer ear "up and out" to help straighten out the canal, which will allow better access for the water.
5. Tilt your head so the ear to be treated is upmost.
6. Place the tip of the syringe into the opening of the ear.- Do NOT push the syringe further into the ear and gently squirt one or more bulb syringes of water into your ear. (This might be best done in the shower so that the excess water will run into the bathtub and not on your floor.)
7. Allow the water to remain in your ear for at least 60 seconds. Gently tilt your head in the opposite direction and wiggle your outer ear

If, after 3 weeks or more, you are still deaf from wax despite the above methods, you may need to seek advice from the surgery what should be done next.

Ear irrigation (ear syringing):

Carn to Coast Health Centres do not currently offer ear irrigation / syringing within the Practice. We have experienced high and increasing levels of demand from patients for medical attention and, while such demand persists, we take the view that clinically necessary treatments have to be given priority over ancillary services which are not required to be offered under the NHS and which many surgeries across the UK do not now offer. The Practice will consider reviewing this policy as and when circumstances allow it but it will be necessary to obtain legal advice before any resumption as ear syringing can lead to infections, a perforated ear drum and/or tinnitus (persistent noise), and such complications have given rise to claims against surgeries. We acknowledge that other surgeries locally may have a different policy and there are also local options outside the NHS for having ear wax removed (by microsuction):

Kernow Ear Health: <https://www.kernowearhealth.co.uk/> telephone 07708 041631

Specsavers Truro: <https://www.specsavers.co.uk> telephone 01872 223818