

Looking After Your Ears

What is ear wax and why do we need it?

Ear wax or cerumen is a completely natural substance found in the ear canal. It has antibacterial and lubricating properties which are essential in protecting the delicate inner ear from objects such as dust, debris and small objects. Ear wax also protects the delicate and sensitive skin of the ear canal from irritation. Ordinarily a small amount of ear wax is not problematic and completely normal for most people.

When is it a problem?

Ear wax can however become problematic for some people when it builds up. This can cause several problems, such as deafness, poor fitting of hearing devices, tinnitus and general discomfort. If ear wax is causing any of the above issues, there are many solutions which may be offered to you.

What should I do first?

Caring for your ears at home, is both safe and often effective at removing small amounts of ear wax. If you have been given this leaflet by a healthcare professional, it is important to follow the steps carefully to ensure no damage is caused to your ears.

- Using a dropper and some room temperature olive oil, instil 2 drops into the affected ear.
- Once the oil is inserted, lay on the opposite side for around 15 minutes, this allows the oil to penetrate the ear wax.
- If required repeat the same process for the opposite ear.
- Do not insert any cotton wool following oil insertion as the cotton wool will soak up the oil preventing it from lubricating the ear canal.
- Repeat the above process 3-4 times a day for the next 3-5 days.
- If no improvement has occurred after five days, your doctor may prescribe or advise you to purchase some sodium bicarbonate 5% ear drops.
- The steps above should be followed with the sodium bicarbonate drops.

What if I am still having problems?

If you have followed all the above steps and you are still experiencing problems, please return to your healthcare professional for further care and advice.

REMEMBER

Nothing smaller than your elbow should be inserted into your ear. This especially applies to ear buds, these are potentially very damaging to your ears and can push any existing ear wax further into the canal, creating a solid plug which can be pushed against the ear drum causing further issues.

Ear candles and other insertable devices may promise easy and safe wax extraction, but they are not proven to be safe and can cause impaction of wax and perforation of the ear drum.