

# Treatment of Ear Wax

## Patient advice

Ear wax is normal and has many functions including protecting the ear drum from foreign bodies, moisturising and lubricating the ear canal, trapping dust, micro-organism and other debris, and cleansing the ear canal. It also has antibiotic, antibacterial and antifungal properties. In short ear wax is wonderful!

Ears are self-cleaning; they should not be prodded with cotton buds. Ear wax which is produced will gradually find its own way out of the canal where it can be removed with a tissue. Occasionally ear wax can become dry and a build up can occur, causing temporary impairment of hearing. In this instance, the safest and first line approach is oiling of the ear.

**The following instruction should be adopted when oiling ears to soften wax build up:**

- Lie flat on your side with the affected ear uppermost
- Pulling back the ear just above the fleshy part, insert 4-5 drops of Almond or Olive oil into the ear canal. Droppers can be purchased from local pharmacies. Oil should be at room temperature and should not be heated.
- Remain lying in this position for 15 minutes to allow the oil to work.
- During this time, massage the area in front of the affected ear to spread the oil around inside.
- After 15 minutes, sit up and tissue away any excess oil.
- Do not insert cotton buds or cotton wool into the canal as this may push wax further inside, damage the lining of the ear canal or the eardrum.
- Repeat the process on the other ear as required

**Ears should be oiled in the way TWICE DAILY FOR 2 WEEKS.** If your ears continue to feel blocked or your hearing is impaired, please arrange an appointment with the GP for an ear assessment. The GP may then advise you to continue with the oiling process as required. Occasionally, the GP may advise that ear irrigation is required.

**Ear irrigation is not a first line treatment for ear wax. It can result in serious complications** including perforation of the ear drum, infection of the outer ear or inner ear pain, acute or recurrent vertigo, tinnitus and loss of hearing.

Patients who have been advised by audiology departments to have ear assessment prior to attendance at a clinic, may be advised by the practice nurse to reschedule their clinic appointment if their ears are blocked with wax, to allow time for safe removal of ear wax.

### Ears and flying

Some people develop ear pain when flying. Practical help can be found at <http://patient.info/health/ears-and-flying>