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## EAR WAX BUILD-UP

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### What is ear wax?

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Ear wax is normal. It protects the skin inside the ear canal from dust, dirt, bacteria and water.

Most people do not need to clean their ears. The ear usually clears wax naturally by moving it slowly outwards.

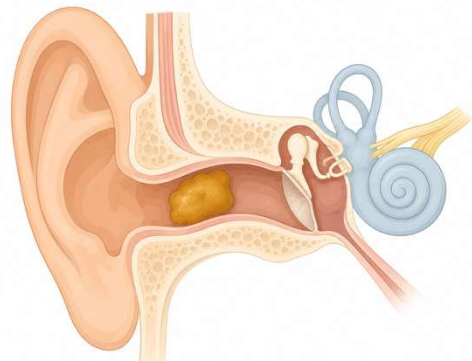
Some people naturally produce more wax than others.

### When can ear wax cause problems?

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Ear wax can sometimes build up and cause symptoms such as:

- Blocked ears
- Reduced hearing
- Ear fullness or pressure
- Crackling or popping sounds
- Ringing or buzzing in the ear (tinnitus)
- Hearing aids not working properly
- Difficulty examining the ear



Ear wax is usually a nuisance rather than a serious problem.

### What should I avoid?

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Do not put anything inside your ear canal, including:

- Cotton buds
- Fingers
- Hair grips
- Ear candles
- Ear cameras or scraping tools

These often push wax deeper into the ear and can damage the ear canal or ear drum.

### Olive oil drops

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Olive oil drops or spray help soften wax and are often all that is needed.

Use 2 to 3 drops twice daily for up to 7 days.

*How to use the drops:*

- Warm the bottle in your hand first.
- Lie with the affected ear facing upwards.
- Put the drops into the ear.
- Stay lying down for 5 to 10 minutes.
- Wipe away any excess oil from the outer ear.

You may not see wax come out. It often clears gradually by itself.

If you often get wax build-up, using olive oil once or twice weekly may help keep wax soft.

### **Sodium bicarbonate drops**

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If olive oil does not help, sodium bicarbonate drops can be bought from pharmacies and may work better for harder wax.

These should usually only be used for a short period.

Ask a pharmacist if you are unsure.

### **Bulb syringing at home**

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Some people use a rubber bulb syringe to gently rinse softened wax from the ear at home.

This should only be tried after using drops for at least 1 to 2 weeks.

*Do not use bulb syringing if you:*

- Have ear pain or discharge
- Have had ear surgery
- Have a hole in the ear drum
- Have grommets
- Have had repeated ear infections
- Only hear from one ear
- Feel dizzy

If you are unsure, speak to a clinician first.

### **When should I contact the practice?**

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*Please contact us if:*

- Your hearing remains blocked after using drops
- You have significant pain
- You have discharge or bleeding
- You become dizzy
- Symptoms are only on one side
- Your hearing suddenly worsens
- You think something else may be wrong

A clinician can check whether wax is the cause.

### **Ear irrigation and micro-suction**

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Most ear wax settles with drops and time.



If wax remains troublesome, a clinician may discuss other options such as ear irrigation or micro suction.

These procedures are not suitable for everyone.

If irrigation is planned, you will usually be given a separate information leaflet explaining preparation, risks and aftercare.

## Further reading

- **NHS: Earwax build-up**  
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/earwax-build-up/>
- **Patient.info: Earwax**  
<https://patient.info/ears-nose-throat-mouth/hearing-problems/earwax>
- **NICE CKS: Earwax**  
<https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/earwax/>

## Further information and contacting us

If you need help, the best way to contact us is our **online triage form** on the **CHG website**:

<https://www.cirencesterhealthgroup.co.uk/online-triage/>

If you cannot use the online form, please call the practice.


For **urgent problems** when we are closed, please use NHS **111**.

For **emergencies**, call **999**.

# Ear Wax Build-Up

## Simple steps to manage ear wax at home

### 1. Ear wax is normal



Ear wax protects the ear canal from dust, dirt, bacteria and water.

The ear usually clears wax naturally.


### 2. Try olive oil drops first



- 1 Warm the bottle.
- 2 Lie with ear facing up.
- 3 Put in 2-3 drops.
- 4 Stay lying down 5-10 minutes.
- 5 Wipe excess oil from outer ear.

Use twice daily for up to 7 days. May not see wax come out – it often clears gradually.

### 3. Bulb syringing (if needed)



- Use after drops for 1-2 weeks.
- Use warm water.
- Gently squeeze to rinse.
- Tilt head to let water drain out.

Only if suitable for you – see when not to use below.

### 4. Avoid putting anything in your ear



These can push wax deeper and cause injury or infection.

### 5. When to seek help



Hearing stays blocked after using drops

Pain in the ear

Discharge or bleeding

Dizziness

Only one ear affected


Sudden worsening of hearing

You are not sure

A clinician can check your ear and advise the best treatment for you.

If you often get wax build-up, use olive oil drops once or twice weekly to help keep wax soft.

### 6. Next steps



If wax remains troublesome, a clinician may discuss other options such as ear irrigation or microsuction.

These are not suitable for everyone.

