**A Guide to Earwax**

Ear wax can be a concern for patients and is a common reason to contact the practice. The good news is most of the time it can be safely self-managed at home. Your local pharmacist can advise you about suitable ear drops and other self-care options available.

About Ear Wax

* It is normal and everyone has it
* It is important for the protection of your ears and it lubricates the canal
* The ears are self-cleaning
* The movement of your jaw while eating and talking moves the wax along the canal
* It will only become a problem if it causes pain or deafness

What you shouldn’t do

* Do not use cotton buds to clean the ear. This forces the wax deeper into the canal and can cause damage to the canal and drum and possible infection
* Do not use objects such as matches, ear candles, hair grips etc. this can cause trauma and possible infection
* If your ears are itchy do not scratch or rub them with your finger nails or any other objects
* Do not use anything smaller than your elbow in your ear!

What helps?

* Try and keep your ears dry. When washing your hair, showering or swimming putting some Vaseline around the inner part of your ear can help
* Don’t put your head under the water when bathing
* If you regularly get blocked ears, use olive oil drops weekly

When to see the GP

If you are experiencing the following symptoms:

* Pain
* Discharge or bleeding from the ear
* Sudden deafness
* Dizziness
* Foreign bodies (you may be advised to attend A&E)

**Self-managing your ear wax if it’s causing a problem**

Most people who have symptoms caused by earwax can manage this at home with olive oil or other ear drops bought over the counter (e.g. Earex, Cerumol, Earol, Otex). These should be used for 14 days to soften the wax and allow it to be expelled from the canal.

Once wax has been successfully cleared it is suggested to use olive oil drops once a week to keep the wax soft and encourage the natural process of wax expulsion.

How to use olive oil drops

* The drops should be at room temperature before use.
* Lie on your side with the affected ear uppermost
* Pull the outer ear gently backwards and upwards to straighten the ear canal
* Place 3-5 drops into the ear canal and gently massage just in front of the ear. Let the drops soak in for at least 5-10 minutes.
* Afterwards, wipe away any excess oil but do not plug your ear with cotton wool as this simply absorbs the oil
* Your hearing problem may initially worsen after first starting to use the olive oil drops; therefore, you are advised to concentrate on treating one ear at a time if both ears are blocked with wax.
* Repeat three times a day to the affected ear until your hearing improves or for 14 days.
* In most cases, the wax will have softened sufficiently to encourage the wax to come out without further intervention.

Self-irrigation

This can be effective for removing wax, used with ear drops. You can discuss options available with your local pharmacist, such as the **bulb syringe**. This will come with specific instructions on safe use.

**Microsuction**

Microsuction is an alternative method of earwax removal available privately. It is undertaken using a microscope and a medical suction device.

Microsuction is safer than ear irrigation and can also be a more comfortable method of earwax removal as no liquids are used during the procedure.

The ear canal can be seen clearly, and more importantly, exactly what is being done, therefore making it an exceptionally safe procedure.

Microsuction is offered as a private service at a number of local practices including:

1. Greenway Community Practice - 9598939

[www.greenwaycommunitypractice.nhs.uk](http://www.greenwaycommunitypractice.nhs.uk)

1. Fallodon Way Medical Centre- 9620652

[www.tmwc.org.uk](http://www.tmwc.org.uk)

1. Keynsham Hearing Centre- 9864242

[www.keynshamhearing.co.uk](http://www.keynshamhearing.co.uk)

**Ear irrigation**

Whilst we are not contracted or funded in general practice to provide ear irrigation, we recognize the impact this can have on certain groups of patients. Therefore, we are able to offer appointments for ear irrigation where self-care has been unsuccessful to the following patient groups:

1. Patients over 75
2. Very frail patients
3. Patients with hearing aids or under audiology
4. Patients with Learning disability
5. Patients who are visually impaired
6. Individual medical exemptions identified by the doctor

Please note, the following patients should not use olive oil drops or have ear irrigation:

* Known hole in ear drum (also known as a perforation)
* Middle ear infection in past 6 weeks
* Acute outer ear infection
* Presence of a foreign body
* Grommets in place
* Recent ear surgery

These patients will need to see a GP to assess the need for onward referral to the ENT team.