



Earwax build-up

Self-care

Excessive Earwax build-up

Ear wax is normal and is produced to form a protective coating in the ear canal. It helps to keep the ears healthy, it is anti-fungal and antibacterial. Ears are normally self-cleaning - the movement of your jaw whilst eating and talking helps to move the wax along the canal where it will usually fall out naturally without you noticing. However, wearing hearing aids, ear plugs or earphones, can prevent this natural clearing and cause a build-up. Some people regularly get blocked ears because they produce too much earwax.

Other factors which can increase the risk of too much earwax include:

- Producing naturally hard dry earwax
- Having narrow or hairy ear canals (the tube between the ear opening and the eardrum)
- Being elderly, as earwax becomes drier with age
- Bony Growths in the outer part of the ear canal.

If wax is not causing any problems, it's best left alone.

Important: don't use your fingers or any objects like cotton buds to remove earwax. This will push it in and make it worse.

How you can treat excessive earwax build-up yourself

Earwax usually falls out on its own. If it doesn't and blocks your ear, you can use olive oil or almond oil drops 3-4 times a day for 7-10 days. If ear wax remains, sodium bicarbonate drops can be used twice a day for five days. Ear drops are widely available from supermarkets and pharmacies. If you have any questions regarding ear wax and how to use ear drops, your local pharmacist will be able to advise you.

How to administer ear drops

- Lie on your side with the affected ear uppermost
- Pull the outer ear gently backwards and upwards to straighten the ear canal
- Put 2-3 drops into the affected ear and gently massage just in front of the ear
- Stay lying on your side to allow the solution to soak in for around five minutes

- Afterwards, wipe away any excess solution but do not plug your ear with cotton wool as this simply absorbs the oil.

In most cases, the wax will have dissolved sufficiently after two courses of self care (olive oil/almond oil for 7 - 10 days followed by sodium bicarbonate twice a day for 5 days if required). However, if you feel your hearing is still impaired, speak to your GP practice. Surprisingly, you will not necessarily see the wax come out. It often seems to come out unnoticed.

Earwax and hearing aids

Hearing aid users are at high risk for excessive ear wax build-up. The presence of a foreign object in the ear seems to stimulate more wax production by the cerumen glands.

Hearing aids need to be cleaned daily, allowed to dry overnight and cleaned with a brush in the morning to remove wax and debris. Failure to follow this cleaning step will reintroduce wax and debris into the ear and will prevent the aid from working effectively.

When to see a nurse or doctor

If two courses (olive oil/almond oil drops followed by sodium bicarbonate drops) of self-care has not been successful.

AND / OR

You are experiencing one or more of the following symptoms:

- Earache
- Hearing loss
- Discharge or bleeding from the ear
- Sudden buzzing

Other helpful sources

NHS 111: 111.nhs.uk

NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence): www.nice.org.uk

For NHS Advice: [Earwax build-up
nhs.uk/conditions/earwax-build-up/](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/earwax-build-up/)