

# Blocked Ears (Wax) self-care guidelines for patients

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## Ear wax

Ear wax is a normal build-up of dead cells, hair, foreign material such as dust, and natural wax which forms a protective coating on the skin in the ear canal. The quantity of ear wax produced varies greatly from person to person.

A clinician can look into the ear canal and confirm a plug of ear wax has formed. A plug of ear wax is not a serious problem, more a nuisance. You only need to remove ear wax if it is causing symptoms such as dulled hearing or when fitting a hearing aid.

## How to remove ear wax

If you think you have ear wax, do not try to clean your ear canal with cotton wool buds. This can make things worse, as you will push some ear wax deeper inside. It may also cause an ear infection.

## Ear drops

Ear drops alone will clear a plug of ear wax in most cases. Put two or three drops of ordinary olive oil down the ear two or three times a day for two or three weeks. This softens the wax so that it then runs out of its own accord without harming the ear. You can continue for any length of time, but three weeks is usually enough. Surprisingly, you will not necessarily see wax come out. It often seems to come out unnoticed.

If you are prone to repeated wax build up, you can continue to use olive oil drops twice a week to prevent recurrence.

If olive oil does not work, you can buy sodium bicarbonate drops from pharmacies.

## How to use ear drops

1. Warm the drops to room temperature before using them
2. Pour a few drops into the affected ear
3. Lie with the affected ear uppermost when putting in drops
4. Stay like this for ten minutes to allow the drops to soak into the ear wax

## Ear irrigation

Ear irrigation is only recommended in the rare occasions where ear drops have failed to work. On occasion ear irrigation can lead to ear infections, perforated ear drum and tinnitus (persistent noise). If you think you have persisting wax despite taking the above measures, please make an appointment with your doctor or nurse.