



Ear Wax and Ear Care Advice

Patient Information Leaflet

The area between the opening to the ear and the eardrum (ear canal) is self-cleaning. Only the outside of the ear needs to be cleaned/dried, using a soft clean towel or tissue.

Wax is produced in the ear canal and moves slowly outwards, taking the trapped dust with it. Wax is necessary to protect, moisturise and waterproof the canal. It helps prevent ear infection.

It is not harmful and is not a result of poor personal hygiene.

A build-up of wax may occur, especially in the elderly and those who:

- Use cotton buds, hairclips or other objects to clean their ears
- Use ear plugs
- Work in dusty environments
- Have narrow ear canals

What are the Symptoms?

Wax build-up may result in:

- Reduction in hearing
- Discomfort/pain in the ear
- Noise or ringing in the ear
- Feeling of blockage in the ear
- Temporary deafness after hair washing or swimming.

What is the Treatment?

Wax can be removed by syringing, but must first be softened. Use olive oil from a dropper, which can be bought in a chemist. It does not need to be heated, use at room temperature.

Inform the doctor/nurse if you have had a hole in your eardrum, any ear surgery, or a problem with ear syringing in the past, as this treatment may not be suitable.

How to use Olive Oil

Lying down with head to one side pull the ear upward and backwards to straighten the ear canal. Drop 4 drops of olive oil into the ear canal. **You may need somebody to help you do this.**

Wait for 10 minutes to allow for absorption of the oil and wipe away excess oil when you sit up. Do not plug the ear with cotton wool

Repeat the treatment on the other ear if necessary.

Drops should be used 3-4 times a day for 1 week.

N.B. If you do not use the oil as you have been advised, the wax may not soften and you may need to come back to the hospital another time.

Syringing

Warm water is pumped gently into the ear canal to wash the wax outwards into a receiver. It is not generally painful. Washing is stopped if you feel discomfort. Your ear is examined with a light and is checked regularly during the procedure.

Advice after syringing

The ear canal may be prone to infection for 4-5 days until more wax is produced to protect it. We suggest that you keep the ears dry when washing your hair. Water, soaps, shampoos or sprays may irritate the skin and lead to infection.

In the unlikely event that you develop pain, dizziness, tinnitus, reduced hearing or discharge from the ear, consult the A&E department.

Prevention of Wax Build-up

Use olive oil once a week to keep the wax soft and minimise build-up.

Avoid inserting any object into the ear canal. If the entrance to the ear canal is dry and itchy it may be useful to insert 1 drop of olive oil to relieve the itch.

We hope that this information is helpful to you. If anything is unclear, or you have any other questions you would like to ask, then please do ask the nurse/doctor.

**Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital
Emergency Department
01 7088535**

Revision History

Ref No.	Version No.	Date Approved	Change	Section No.	Approved by
PIL 017	1	2001	New Information Leaflet	-	
PIL 017	2	March 2014	Revised Information Leaflet	all	Hospital Management Group