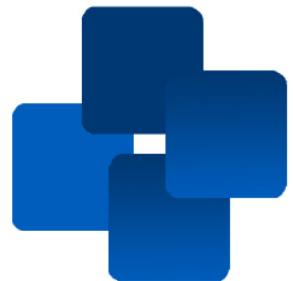


# Patient Information

## Ear Care

Ears, Nose and Throat Department



## **What is ear wax?**

Ear wax is produced to form a protective coating over the skin in the ear canal. 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.

## **Why is my ear blocked with wax?**

Ear wax is normal to have; the amount of ear wax produced varies from person to person. You are more likely to develop a blockage of wax in the ear canal if you:

- Use cotton buds to clean the ear, as this pushes the wax deeper into the canal.
- Wear a hearing aid, ear plugs or use in-ear headphones as these can all interfere with the natural process of wax clearing.
- Have abnormally narrow ear canals.
- Have a particularly hairy ear canal.
- Are elderly, as the ear wax you produce is drier and harder.
- Have a dry skin problem, such as eczema or psoriasis.

Keeping your ears dry will improve this condition. The easiest way to keep ears dry when bathing/showering is by using a small piece of cotton-wool smeared in Vaseline/petroleum jelly.

## **Advice to help you manage and prevent ear wax blockage**

Ear wax only becomes a problem if it causes deafness or discomfort, or if your health professional requires a clear view of your ear drum.

You should seek advice from a nurse or GP if you experience any of the following:

- Pain.
- Discharge or bleeding from the ear.
- Sudden deafness or buzzing.
- Foreign bodies in the ear.
- Dizziness.

If you are not experiencing any of the above, we recommend that you manage the blockage as follows:

**Olive oil drops - The following needs to be done 2-3 times daily for at least 14 days:**

- Lie on your side with the affected ear facing upwards.
- Pull the outer ear gently backwards and upwards to straighten the ear canal.
- Put 2-3 drops of olive oil into the affected ear and gently massage just in front of the ear.
- Stay lying on your side to allow the olive oil to soak in for around 5 minutes.
- Afterwards, wipe away any excess oil but do not plug your ear with cotton wool as this absorbs the oil.

Your hearing problem may initially worsen after first starting to use olive oil so if both ears are blocked with wax we advise you concentrate on treating one ear at a time.

In most cases, after 14 days the wax will have softened sufficiently to encourage the wax to come out without further intervention.

However, if you feel your hearing is still impaired, please contact your GP surgery for further advice and management.

If you feel the olive oil is not working, you may prefer to use sodium bicarbonate 5% ear drops which can be purchased from the chemist. This also softens the wax and may work better for some patients.

If your ears are regularly becoming blocked with wax, after cleaning the blockage we will usually suggest you use olive oil drops as above around once per week to keep the wax soft and encourage the natural process of wax clearing.

Please note that ear syringing is no longer recommended as a method for treating ear wax, due to the potential risk of complications.

**Do not use olive oil if you have a hole in your eardrum (a perforated eardrum).**

## Useful Telephone Numbers

- Switchboard, Lister Hospital  
☎ 01438 314333 - ask for ENT department
- ENT Nurse Specialist (Monday to Friday, 9am - 5pm)  
☎ Mobile: 0778 534 3359 or 0787 639 0290

**In an emergency, dial 999 and request an ambulance or attend your nearest Emergency Department.**

NHS 111 can help if you have an urgent medical problem and you're not sure what to do. It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. ☎ 111

### Useful websites:

[www.entuk.org](http://www.entuk.org)

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/earwax-build-up/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/earwax-build-up/)

**[www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk](http://www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk)**

You can request this information in a different format or another language.

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