

## Ear wax

The most important phrase in the care of ears is “Nothing smaller than your elbow goes in your ear” This limits your options of course. It means cleaning your ears with cotton buds, paperclips; pens and fingers are all banned. The ear produces wax to catch dust and act as a natural antiseptic. It is only produced in the outer part of the ear canal. In that same area there are small hairs, which are responsible for moving the wax out towards the outside world. If you use the above offending items you dirty the end of the instrument but actually push 90% of the wax further in, usually packing it into a hard mass (which is when it leads to problems). People usually ask, “What can you do to clean your ears then?” The answer is the hairs described above, do it all. Leave them alone and you’ll have no further problems.

Obviously your ears may already be blocked from bad practices or through essential use of ear defenders, hearing aids etc (we also realise that a few individuals do produce an unusual amount of wax).

The up-to-date way of clearing wax is simple olive oil (this can be any **olive oil**, available at chemists in dropper bottles or off the shelf oil, avoiding the ones with chillies and garlic soaked in!). Other “specialist drops” offer no advantage.

Use a dropper to apply the oil more easily. You put a few drops in **2-4 times daily** (as below). The most important time is **before you go to bed**. This needs to be done for **10 days to 2 weeks**. Please make an appointment with the nurse at the end of this time. You will be examined and she will determine whether it is clear or needs syringing.

Lie on your side with problem ear upper-most. Try and pull the outer part back and up, if you can (this straightens the canal inside). Fill your ear with oil and stay in that position for 5-10 minutes. Do not put any cotton wool in your ear, as this will absorb the oil and stop it from working into the wax. After 5-10 minutes, sit up, holding a tissue to your ear to catch the oil as it runs out of your ear. Then, if necessary, do the same thing in the other ear. Olive oil is unlikely to cause any irritation to your ear, but it takes quite a long time to have an effect on the wax. If you wish to warm the drops, place the bottle in a cup of hot water (do not heat directly). Occasionally your hearing worsens after the drops go in, as the oil gets behind the wax. This will settle, so continue the treatment as planned.

If you have recurrent or long-term problems putting a few drops in at night twice weekly can help prevent a build up and so avoid the situation. This only really helps once the ears are cleared fully.