

EAR CARE / DE-WAXING

November 2018

In Dorking the policy on ear care was updated in November 2018 to meet current evidenced based guidelines. Ear syringing / irrigation is no longer recommended. If you have ear wax issues please see the information below. If you have a hearing aid you can self-refer to the Surrey Downs CCG audiology services locally who can assist you.

What is the normal function of the ear?

Ears are designed to clean themselves. Earwax 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. Ear wax is needed for lubrication and has anti-bacterial and fungicidal properties. The quantity of earwax produced varies greatly from person to person. You should only become concerned about the amount of wax if you develop pain, hearing impairment or dizziness.

What Can I do if wax builds up?

A plug of wax is not a serious problem, it is normally just a nuisance. Do not try to clean the ear canal yourself. Frequent zealous use of such instruments as cotton buds, rolled towel ends, hair grips etc can make things worse as you will push wax deeper inside. It may also cause an ear infection.

How do I remove ear wax safely?

Olive oil drops

The simplest method is to use olive oil drops. These can be bought from a pharmacy or you can use a dropper and ordinary olive oil, from any supermarket. You should expect to use olive oil twice a day for at least 7 to 14 days. After this if you are still no better contact the surgery so we can examine you again.

1. Lie down with the affected ear facing the ceiling.
2. Pull the earlobe upwards and backward to help open your ear canal.
3. Add 2 to 4 drops of oil into the ear canal. The temperature of the oil should be lukewarm about body temperature (37 degrees Celsius). **DO NOT** heat it up on the stove or microwave otherwise you could burn your ear.
4. Stay lying down for 5 minutes to allow time for the oil soften the wax
5. Sit up and let the oil drain out onto a tissue paper and wipe the excess away. **DO NOT** put the paper or cotton wool in the ear canal itself.
6. Chewing sugar-free gum on the affected side in the day can also help dislodge the wax.

What if I regularly get ear wax issues?

If you suffer from dry, itchy ears or if wax is a regular problem, then putting olive oil in regularly 2 to 3 times a week can help control the situation.

What happens if olive oil does not work?

Sodium Bicarbonate Drops

Follow the same process as olive oil drops, insert 3 drops of Sodium Bicarbonate and leave in your ear for three minutes. This should be repeated three times a day, ideally for at least three weeks. Hearing may temporarily worsen as the bicarbonate expands creating a tunnelling effect until the wax totally dissolves.

Other drops are available over the counter but can contain products that dry the wax out and make it harder to dislodge and also can irritate and inflame the ear canal so we do not recommend these.

Ear Bulb Syringe (80 – 90mls)

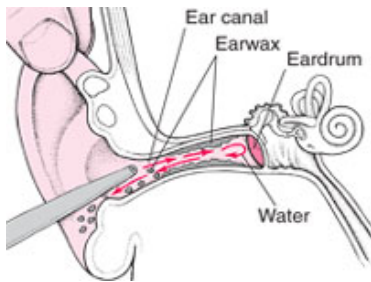


If the other methods do not work then using an ear bulb syringe can be very effective. These can be bought for around £5 and can be reused for years. You should have used olive oil for at least 2 weeks prior to using the ear bulb. You can fill the bulb syringe with just warm water or a mixture of warm water and either olive oil or baby oil. Some people use a 50:50 mixture of hydrogen peroxide and water but this can irritate the ear canal. The mixture should be lukewarm and close to body temperature.

Is it safe for me to use an Ear Bulb Syringe?

Studies have shown it is safer than ear syringing, but risks include infection, failure to remove the wax and ear drum perforation. Do not use the ear bulb syringe if you have pain in the ear, a history of ear drum perforation, recent or current ear infection, if you have a discharge from the ear, you are deaf in the other ear or had had previous ear surgery.

The best place to do this is over a sink or bowl with a towel to help catch the water. To begin fill your affected ear with the mixture and leave for 5 minutes to soften the wax. Then tilt your head over the sink or bowl, pull the top of your ear up, and insert the bulb syringe just into the ear canal. Do not push deep into the canal. Resting the tip just in front of the entrance is safest. Then, squirt the warm oil and water mixture into the ear canal. You want to have enough pressure so the mixture rushes into the canal but does not hurt. The solution should rush into the ear canal and then drain out into the sink or bowl. Look for small clumps of ear wax in the sink to make sure you got the impacted ear wax out. You should repeat flushing the ear a few times to make sure the ear wax all comes out.



What if my ears are still blocked?

If you have been using drops for over 2 weeks and are not keen to use the ear bulb syringe OR have tried using the ear bulb syringe twice without success, then please contact the surgery to review. You may need to be referred for microsuction to clear the wax.

Where can I find further information?

There are some great patient information leaflets <https://patient.info/health/hearing-problems/earwax> or <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/earwax-build-up/>

For the evidence on ear bulb syringe use visit

<http://www.cityandhackneyccg.nhs.uk/Downloads/gp/Pathways/Ear%20Wax%20Bulb%20syringe%20pat hway%20-%20Approved%20Dec%202014.pdf>