Ear Irrigation

Patient Information Leaflet



**Ear Irrigation**

**WE NO LONGER OFFER ROUTINE EAR IRRIGATION**

**This service will only be offered if:**

* AUDIOLOGY OR SECONDARY CARE REQUESTS THIS PROCEDURE
* YOU WEAR HEARING AIDS
* YOU HAVE LEARNING DISABILITIES OR DEMENTIA
* A GP REQUIRES THIS IN ORDER TO MAKE AN ASSESSMENT OR DIAGNOSIS

The purpose of this leaflet is to help you to understand what wax is and why it can build up. It will equip you with techniques to help care for your ear at home and will also provide information relating to services and options available to you.



**The ear and ear wax**

Ear wax is produced in the outer part of the ear canal and is very normal. Its main function is to protect your ear. It has lubrication and antibacterial qualities to keep your ear free of germs and debris.

Your ear is self-cleaning. Most of the time chewing and jaw movements help to move wax through the ear canal. However, sometimes the ear can still become blocked. Reasons for this may be:

* Some people naturally produce a lot of wax.
* The wax produced is naturally hard or dry.
* Narrow or hairy ear canals.
* Being elderly – ear wax can become drier with age.

Ear wax can also block your ears if you frequently insert objects into the ear, such as hearing aids, ear plugs, earphones, or cotton buds.

**Home treatment**

If you are concerned that your ears are blocked and you don’t fit into the above eligibility criteria there are home treatments you can try. The pharmacy can give you advice on suitable wax softening products and how to use them.

Discontinue use of a product if it causes pain or discomfort and seek advice.

If your problems persist despite trying home care remedies or you have pain or discharge coming from your ear discontinue using the product and make an appointment to see a GP or nurse practitioner. They will have a look inside your ear and direct you to the best possible treatment.

**Ear irrigation at the surgery**

If you fit into the above eligibility criteria for irrigation at the surgery you should follow the instructions below.

Ear preparation prior to irrigation at the surgery

If you are eligible for irrigation at the surgery you need to soften the ear wax using olive oil 2-3 times a day for 2-3 weeks. To do this you should:

1. Lie down with the affected ear upwards
2. Gently pull the outer ear backwards and upwards (this straightens the ear canal)
3. Using room temperature olive oil, drop 1-2 drops into the ear canal. (If you are unable to do this, it may be easier for someone else to do it for you)
4. Remain lying on your side for at least 10-15 minutes and when you sit up, wipe away the excess oil. Do not put any cotton wool in your ear because this will absorb the oil.
5. Repeat the procedure with the opposite ear if necessary.

You can buy olive oil and droppers in the pharmacy or supermarket. A spray bottle is also available to buy which delivers a measured dose and is easier to use if you have poor dexterity in your hands. You do not need a prescription for olive oil drops.

**This procedure will be carried out in the treatment room. The Nurse will go through the consent form with you to ensure that you are suitable for ear irrigation and to ensure that you understand what the procedure involves.**

**You should not have your ears irrigated if:**

* You have had a complication following the procedure in the past.
* A history of an infection in the ear in the last 6 weeks.
* You have had any surgery on your ear (apart from grommets which have been removed at least 18 months previously).
* You have a current ear drum perforation or one in the last year.
* You have pain/tenderness or swelling of the outer ear which could indicate an infection.
* You tympanic membrane (ear drum) is visible.

The Nurse will also examine your ears prior to irrigation to ensure that the ear drum (tympanic membrane) is not visible.

Please note that the above preparation may be enough to remove the wax from your ear canal.

If your ear drum is visible during the examination they cannot irrigate your ear as this could damage the ear drum.

If this is the case but there is still wax present in the ear canal you may be asked to continue with the olive oil – advice will be provided at the appointment.

**Following irrigation, the Nurse will provide information on post-irrigation care.**

**Useful Resources**

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| NHS Choices website | https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/earwax-build-up/ |
| Patient.co.uk | https://patient.info/health/hearing-problems/earwax |
| British Tinnitus Association | https://www.tinnitus.org.uk/ear-wax |

**Maintenance**

Some people are naturally prone to ear wax build up. Following ear irrigation it is recommended that you use 1-2 drops of olive oil once a week. This will not stop ear wax being produced but will ensure that it remains soft with the aim to prevent recurrent impaction.

This policy is effective from 1st August 2019