

Coastal West Sussex Clinical Commissioning Group

Patient Information Leaflet on Earwax

What is ear wax?

Sometimes excessive wax can build up inside the ear canal causing symptoms such as a pain, hearing loss, and fullness in ears or itchiness. This can happen for a number of reasons including hairy or narrow ear canals, using hearing aids and the use of cotton wool buds.

How can it be treated?

A build-up of earwax can be treated with ear drops which are available from your local pharmacy. These can help soften and loosen the ear wax which may help it work its way out naturally.

Olive Oil: This comes as a spray or drops and is often used to soften the wax. This is a gentler treatment and is often recommended if you have eczema in your ears. Ideally, you should apply this treatment once daily (perhaps before sleeping) to prevent the build-up of wax on a long-term basis after the wax build up is clear. It is not necessary to put cotton wool in your ears afterwards. We never recommend you use cotton buds in your ears.

Sodium Bicarbonate solution: You should use these drops for up to 1 week, applying 2 times a day with 2 drops in the ear. The sodium bicarbonate dissolves the wax. Your hearing may temporarily worsen as the wax softens before it dissolves. For this reason, we suggest treating one ear at a time. The drops should be left in your ear for up to 3 minutes. When it improves you could use the drops less frequently.

Other earwax drops: There are a number of other eardrops such as Otex, which help remove wax. Your pharmacist will be able to advise you.

Irrigation or micro suction: If eardrops have not been successful (or appropriate) in removing your earwax, you may be referred by your GP or nurse to have a further procedure, either irrigation or micro suction to remove the earwax. The procedures are quick and safe.

Do you have an audiology appointment?

Your ears will need to be free from wax for your audiology appointment. If your ears contain wax, it may lead to delays in your treatment and require additional appointments. Olive Oil drops can be used to soften earwax and help it come out of the ear. 2 to 3 drops should be used twice a day for at least one week before your appointment.

If you know or suspect that your eardrum is perforated, do you do not use drops unless directed by your doctor.