

Appendix C: Patient Leaflet on Earwax / Ear care

1. What is earwax?

Sometimes excessive wax can build up inside the ear canal causing symptoms such as ear 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.

2. How can it be treated?

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

- Olive oil: This comes as a spray or drops and is used to soften the wax. This is a gentler treatment and is often recommended if you have eczema in your ears. Allow the olive oil to reach room temperature before using. To treat ear wax you should apply this twice a day for several days. After applying a generous amount of oil lie with the affected ear uppermost for 5 to 10 minutes. It is not necessary to put cotton wool in your ears afterwards. We never recommend you use cotton buds 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.

- Sodium Bicarbonate solution: You should use these drops for up to 1 week, applying 2 times a day with 3-4 drops in the ear. The sodium bicarbonate dissolves the wax. Your hearing may temporarily worsen as the wax swells 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 ear wax drops: There are a number of other ear drops such as Otex, which help remove wax. Your pharmacist will be able to advise you.
- Irrigation or Microsuction: If ear drops have not been successful (or appropriate) in removing your ear wax, you may be referred by your GP or nurse to have a further procedure, either Irrigation or microsuction to remove the earwax. The procedures are quick and safe.

3. 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 ear wax and help it come out of the ear. 2 -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 not use drops unless directed by your doctor.