

What is ear wax?

Ear wax is a natural secretion of fats and oils produced in the ear. It is similar to sweat. The wax also contains dead skin, hair, dust and dirt from the world outside which is why we have wax, to protect and keep the ear clean.

Why is it there?

Ear wax keeps the lining of the ear canal moist and clean. It is moved out of the ear by hairs and is removed by normal washing.

It is only when wax becomes hard and causes problems that you know it is there and need to do something about it.

What does it do?

Sometimes excess wax is produced and can form a plug which causes a feeling of having a blocked ear and can also affect hearing. Sometimes it causes ringing in the ear, deafness or pain.

Who suffers with wax?

Everyone has wax, and anyone can suffer with excessive wax.

How do I treat it?

A few drops of wax softener such as olive oil (yes kitchen stuff will do- just make sure you haven't cooked with it first!) put in the affected ear each night for a week will soften the wax, usual showering or washing will remove the wax as it becomes soft and leaves the ear canal. This should resolve the problem.

If it persists see your GP to check there are no other problems with the ear, he/she may give you prescription ear drops to help, and syringing is not done routinely these days.

Care of your ears

Never insert anything into your ear canal; objects like cotton buds, matches, paperclips, pens can cause serious damage to the fragile ear drum. Cotton buds can be used to clean the outer ear but **never** the ear canal. If you have a problem with wax, try olive oil for a week at night, if the problem persists see your GP.

Avoid exposure to loud noise, use hearing protection when required both at work and at home. When fitting well, hearing protection should reduce your level of hearing.

When using disposable hearing protection, change it when visibly dirty and it should be changed every day. Roll plugs between fingers, hold ear upwards and insert plug, hold plug in place until the ear canal feels full.

When using ear muffs before putting them on, check they are clean and do not have debris in them which will fall into the ear canal.

Attend your hearing assessments - the person carrying out these tests will look in your ear to detect any signs of a problem before the test.