



# Ear Wax Removal Self-help Guide

## What is earwax?

Earwax forms a protective coating of the skin in the ear canal and minute amounts are made continually. The quantity of earwax varies from person to person and may cause a feeling of fullness and dullness in hearing. A plug of wax is not serious, but can be a nuisance. Do not try to clean the ear canal with cotton wool buds. This only pushes the wax in further – let the ear clean itself.

## What can I do if there is a build-up of wax causing problems?

Clinical evidence suggests that using ear drops for up to 8 weeks to aid removal of wax is AS EFFECTIVE as ear syringing and does not carry the same level of COMPLICATIONS that can be associated with ear syringing. 1 in 1000 patients complain of ear syringing complications which include: perforation/ infection/ permanent hearing loss/ tinnitus/ dizziness and headaches. Using Ear drops is also preferable as it

does not stimulate the production of wax like syringing does.

*Evidence- NICE and Cochrane systematic review of using ear drops vs ear syringing (Burton + Doree 2009) and recent guidance from Primary Care Ear Trainers 2014 and expert opinion Handzel et al 2003*

## How to instil Ear Drops:

- Eardrops alone will often clear a plug of wax, and you can buy drops from the pharmacist, e.g. sodium bicarbonate, or olive oil.
  - 1) Warm the drops to room temperature before using.
  - 2) Put a few drops in the affected ear.
  - 3) Lie with the affected ear uppermost when putting in drops.
  - 4) Remain in this position for a few minutes to allow the drops to penetrate.
  - 5) Drops should be repeated at least twice daily for up to 8 weeks.
  - 6) If your symptoms are still persisting after 8 weeks, please book a routine appointment for a discussion in case you need to be referred.