

## Where can I get advice and support on treatment options for ear wax build up?

Firstly, you should try to speak to your GP, Specialist or hearing aid provider as they will have the most recent clinical information about your ears.

If you have a complaint about an NHS service, you may wish to contact the ICB's Complaints Team. The Complaints Team will not be able to make any changes to the treatment options you have been offered, but can work with the clinician to understand the options that have been considered and any reasons for the clinical decisions that have been made.

### By Post:

The Complaints Team  
NHS Herefordshire and  
Worcestershire ICB  
Kirkham House  
John Comyn Drive  
Perdiswell  
Worcester WR3 7NS

### By Email:

[hw.complaints@nhs.net](mailto:hw.complaints@nhs.net)

## Documents that have helped us produce this Patient Information Leaflet

- British Society of Audiology (2021). Practice Guidance, Aural Care (Ear Wax Removal). Available at: <https://www.thebsa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/OD104-93-BSA-Practice-Guidance-Aural-Care-Ear-Wax-Removal.pdf>
- NICE (2016) [Scenario: Management | Management | Earwax | CKS | NICE](#)
- NICE (2019): [Quality statement 1: Earwax removal | Hearing loss in adults | Quality standards | NICE](#)

# Self Management of Ear Wax



Do you need this document in other languages or formats (i.e. large print)? Please contact the Communications Team: [hw.comms@nhs.net](mailto:hw.comms@nhs.net)

## What is ear wax?

Ear wax is normal. It protects your ear canal and prevents debris entering the ear canal, protecting the ear drum and inner ear.

Wax is gradually produced and naturally works its way out of the ear canal.

## What makes wax build up more likely?

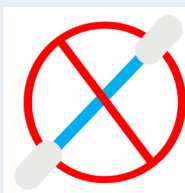
Wearing a hearing aid can prevent wax leaving the ear canal naturally.

We recommend having some time in the day where you can remove your hearing aid(s) and not wearing them at night. The same advice applies for in-ear headphones and earplugs.

Other things that may increase the chances of wax build up are narrow and / or hairy ear canals and dry skin, such as in eczema or psoriasis

## How do I prevent wax build up?

Do not use cotton ear buds to clean your ears as this pushes the wax deeper into the canal and can cause a blockage.



Using olive oil drops once per week can prevent the build-up of wax. This will soften any developing wax and encourage it to move out of the ear canal. Follow the self-management advice overleaf for further information.

## How do I know if I have wax build up?

Signs of wax build up include feeling the wax in your ear, muffled hearing, itchiness and whistling from your hearing aid(s).

If you think your ear(s) are starting to build up with wax, we recommend following the self-management advice below as soon as possible. The more wax that builds up, the harder it is to clear.

## Self-management advice

You can buy olive oil drops from your local Pharmacy or Chemist. We recommend that you read and follow the instructions on the label, but these are likely to say:

1. Lie on your side with the affected ear uppermost.
2. Pull the outer ear gently backwards and upwards to straighten the ear canal.
3. Put 2-3 drops of olive oil into the affected ear and gently massage just in front of the ear.
4. Stay laying on your side to allow the wax to soak in for around 10 mins.
5. Wipe away any excess oil. Do not plug your ear with cotton wool as this absorbs the oil.
6. Repeat this process 2-3 times per day for up to 14 days. The wax should work its way out naturally.

If olive-oil drops have not cleared your wax after that time, then you can repeat the same process as above using Sodium Bicarbonate drops. These can be purchased from your Pharmacy or Chemist. The treatment process will be the same, but Sodium Bicarbonate Drops should only be used for 3-4 days only.

Please note that it is normal for your hearing to sound muffled when the olive oil or sodium bicarbonate drops are in your ear. We recommend that you treat one ear at a time, so that you can continue to hear through the other ear during self-management.

If you experience ongoing pain or dizziness following self-management, you should seek advice from NHS 111, your GP or your hearing service who will advise you on the best course of action.

## When you should not to self-manage

Please note self-management is not suitable for people with any of the following:

- Constant ear pain.
- Discharge / infection in the last 90days.
- Abnormal outer ear.
- History of recurrent ear infections.
- Presence of, or suspected ear drum perforation (hole).
- History of ear drum perforation (hole) OR presence of extra mobile ear drum (hypercompliant tympanogram).
- History of ear surgery (excluding grommet insertion in childhood).
- Presence of a hearing implant of any kind.
- History of dizziness/ vertigo induced by previous self-management.

**If this applies to you and you think that your ear is blocked, please speak to your GP for further advice.**