

Patient Information leaflet

Earwax is properly known as cerumen.

Cerumen is normal and is designed to trap things like dirt/dust and acts to protect the lining of the ear. It is also slightly acidic and protects the ear from infection. It is continuously produced and is gradually moved towards the entrance of the ear by the self-cleaning mechanism of the skin and by the action of muscles used in chewing and talking. The colour, consistency and amount of earwax produced by individuals vary widely. Wax may appear to be dry and flaky, or crumbly consistency, honey coloured or dark brown and very hard when it may become quite firmly attached to the underlying skin.

However, some people experience problems, and ear irrigation is one way of removing excessive amounts of earwax.

Some of the common problems are:

- **Narrow ear canals** - Dusty or dirty environment, people who work in areas where there is a lot of dust or dirt in the air sometimes finds that this combines with the cerumen in the ear to form a plug.
- **Cleaning attempts** - Using cotton buds, matchsticks and hair clips to try to clean out the ear canals is one of the most common causes of impacted wax. It causes the wax to be forced down the canal and form a hard dry plug against the eardrum. Matchsticks and hair clips can inflict considerable damage to the skin lining of the canal.
- **Earplugs** - The use of earplugs, often mandatory in some occupations, can have a similar effect to cotton buds.
- **Hearing Aid moulds** - They can interfere with the natural ability to shed dead skin and wax, and cause debris to build up in the canal.
- **Habit** - Some people become accustomed to attending regularly for ear irrigation, believing it is necessary to prevent them experiencing hearing loss.
- **Age** - Older people may have drier wax, and older men often develop more hairy ears.

The use of Olive Oil has been clinically proven to be safe and an effective treatment for the treatment of ear wax. The drops should be instilled drops of olive oil twice a day for 14 days. **In the majority of cases this is all that is needed.** See below instructions on how eardrops should be instilled. Do not put cotton wool into your ears, as this will absorb the oil.

- The recommendation is that olive oil should be used for this procedure
- The only reason for carrying out ear irrigation is when hearing is reduced due to wax impacted on the eardrum
- Ear irrigation is not suitable for everyone and it is not recommended on a regular or routine basis

THE USE OF COTTON WOOL BUDS, MATCHSTICKS, HAIRPINS, PAPER CLIPS ETC TO REMOVE WAX IS NOT ADVISED

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Ear irrigation should NOT be used if you have:

- Previously had problems with irrigation, such as pain in your ear or severe vertigo
- A perforated eardrum, or you have had a perforated eardrum in the last 12 months
- A discharge of mucus from your ear, which may indicate an undiagnosed perforation
- had a middle ear infection (otitis media) in the past six weeks
- A grommet (a small, hollow tube surgically inserted into your ear if you have a build-up of fluid that causes hearing difficulties – see below)
- had ear surgery, apart from cases of extruded grommets, within the last 18 months
- A cleft palate (whether repaired or not)
- A foreign body in your ear
- A severe external ear infection (acute otitis externa) with pain in the ear canal or pinna (the visible part of your ear)

Ear irrigation is not recommended if you have a grommet. The grommet creates a passage in your middle ear which allows water to enter during syringing. You should not have ear irrigation if the ear to be treated is your only hearing ear. This is because there is a small chance it could cause permanent hearing loss. Young children who are un-cooperative, and some people with learning difficulties, may also not be able to have ear irrigation.

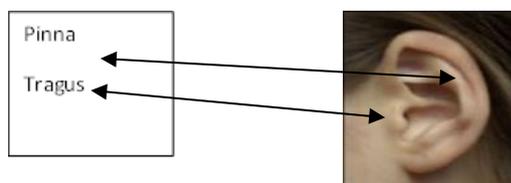
INSTILLATION OF EAR DROPS

In preparation for ear irrigation and to encourage normal wax expulsion from the outer ear

When using olive oil drops:

1 Lie down on your side with the affected ear uppermost

2 Drop 2 or 3 drops of oil (at room temperature) into the ear canal and massage the tragus just in front of the ear and pull the pinna backwards and upwards. This enables the oil to run down the ear canal.



3 Stay lying down for 5 minutes and then wipe away any excess oil.

4 Do not leave cotton wool at the entrance to the ear

5 Repeat the procedure with the opposite ear if necessary.

6 Prior to irrigation insert the drops twice a day for at least 14 days