



## MOWBRAY GROUP

Mowbray House and Hutton Rudby Surgeries

### Self help guide for Ear Wax

In line with current best practice, Mowbray Group Surgeries has, alongside many other GP surgeries locally and nationwide, made the decision to no longer offer an ear irrigation service. This is due to it no longer being the first line treatment for the clearing of ear wax.

Current guidelines are that ear drops should be used to soften the ear wax which will then enable natural movement of the wax from the ear. We have included some more information and treatment options below.

#### What is ear wax?

Ear wax is a build-up of dead cells, hair, foreign material such as dust and cerumen. Cerumen is the natural wax produced by glands in the ear. It forms a protective coating of the skin in the ear canal. Small amounts are made all the time. Flakes or crusts of earwax break off and fall out of the ear from time to time.

#### Important points:

- Ear wax is normal and provides protection for your ears.
- Ears are self-cleaning.
- The movement of your jaw whilst eating and talking helps move wax in your ear canal.
- You do not need to be worried about a plug of earwax, it is not a serious problem, you only need to remove earwax if it is causing symptoms such as reduced hearing or difficulty fitting a hearing aid.

#### What makes ear wax worse?

- The amount of wax produced varies from person to person.
- Some people produce excessive amounts of wax and this can block the ear canal.
- Wearing a hearing aid, ear plugs or headphones can interfere with wax expulsion.
- Narrow and/or hairy ear canals.
- If you are elderly - the wax produced may be harder and drier.
- Dry skin in people who suffer with eczema or psoriasis.

#### What you should not do

- Do not use a cotton bud to clean your ear. This forces the wax deeper into the canal and can cause damage, trauma and possible infection.
- If your ears are itchy do not scratch or rub them with your fingernails or any other objects.

#### What helps?

- Try and keep your ears dry. When washing your hair, showering or swimming putting some Vaseline around the inner part of your ear can help.
- Don't put your head under the water when bathing.
- Some people are troubled by repeated build-up of earwax and may benefit from regular use of ear drops.

## How can you manage the problem yourself?

- Use ear drops. Ear drops alone can unplug earwax in most cases. You can put 2 or 3 drops of ordinary olive oil into your ear using a dropper, 2-3 times a day for 2-3 weeks.

How to use ear drops:

- 1. Warm the drops to room temperature before using them
- 2. Pour a few drops into the affected ear
- 3. Lie with the affected ear uppermost when putting in drops
- 4. Stay like this for 10 minutes to allow the drops to soak into the earwax

This will soften the wax so that it runs out of the ear of its own accord. You can continue with the drops for longer, if necessary, but 3 weeks is usually long enough. You will not necessarily see the wax come out of your ear; it can come out unnoticed. If olive oil does not seem to work, you can buy sodium bicarbonate drops from your local pharmacy.

- If you have a hole in your eardrum (perforated eardrum), do not use ear drops.
- Preventing earwax build-up. You cannot prevent earwax, as it is there to protect your ears from dirt and germs. However, you can continue to use ear drops to soften the wax. This helps earwax come out on its own and should prevent any build up. It is recommended using olive oil drops twice a week to prevent recurrence.

## Different routes

There are now a number of over-the-counter kits that you can purchase from pharmacies & online. These include ear drops which you use for 3-4 days and a small bulb syringe which enables you to remove the wax from your ear yourself. These ear bulb syringes are specifically designed to create enough pressure to clear wax out of the ear without causing damage to the ear drum. It is very important to use hand- temperature, tepid body temperature water for this process having used olive oil or the drops in the previous days. Always follow the instructions provided with the kit.

***Research shows that bulb syringing is effective and acceptable to patients and could significantly reduce the use of NHS resources.***

## Ear irrigation (syringing)

As Ear irrigation is no longer recommended as the first line treatment for blocked ears it is no longer available in the surgery. There is a risk of ear infections, perforated ear drum and tinnitus (persistent noise) from ear irrigation. Your local pharmacist can help with earwax build up and suggest suitable treatments, however there are a number of private services that do still offer ear irrigation which can be researched online.

## When to seek help from a health professional?

If you are experiencing the following symptoms:

- ✓ Pain
- ✓ Discharge or bleeding from the ear
- ✓ Sudden deafness
- ✓ Dizziness
- ✓ Foreign bodies (you may be advised to attend A&E)

After using eardrops for the recommended time your symptoms **still** persist occasionally it may be necessary to refer you to hospital for a procedure called microsuction.

For more information:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/earwax-build-up/>