

## How to use olive oil ear drops:

1. Warm the drops before using them (placing the small bottle in your pocket for 10 minutes will warm them to your body temperature).
2. Lay on your side with your affected ear facing the ceiling.
3. Pull the outer ear gently backwards and upwards, to straighten your ear canal.
4. Put 2 or 3 drops of olive oil into your affected ear, then gently massage your ear.
5. Stay like this for 5-10 minutes, to allow the drops to soak into the earwax.
6. Wipe away any excess oil. Do not plug your ear with cotton wool, as this will absorb the oil.

Your hearing problem may become slightly worse temporarily after you start to use olive oil, so it is better to treat one ear at a time if both of your ears are blocked.

If you get a repeated build-up of wax you can continue to use olive oil drops twice a week. This will help keep the wax soft and encourage the natural process of wax expulsion.

If you feel the olive oil is not working, you may prefer to use sodium bicarbonate 5% ear drops. You can buy these from most pharmacies and use them in the same way. There are also wax softening sprays available to buy from most pharmacies; these can be easy to use, because you don't need to lay down to put them into your ear.

In most cases, after 14 days the wax will have softened enough for it to come out. If your ear hasn't cleared after this time, please contact your GP surgery for further advice.

Not all GP practices remove earwax. If you want to have your ears unblocked through micro-suction you might have to pay privately.



**Oxford University Hospitals**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Blocked Ears (wax)

## A self-care guide for patients



**Oxfordshire**  
Clinical Commissioning Group

**For more information please visit:**

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/earwax-build-up/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/earwax-build-up/)

## What is earwax?

Earwax is normal and is produced to form a protective coating over the skin in the ear canal. Ears are normally self-cleaning; the skin and tiny hairs in your ear canal act like a conveyor belt, stretching along your ear canal from your ear drum bringing any wax and debris. This is helped by the movement of your jaw; when you chew and talk this helps to move the wax along the ear canal, where it will usually fall out naturally without you noticing. Experiencing an earwax blockage is not a serious problem, more a nuisance. Ear syringing or irrigation is no longer routinely recommended as a method for treating earwax, due to the potential risk of complications.



## Why is my ear blocked with wax?

The amount of earwax produced varies from person to person. Sometimes the conveyor belt motion in your ear canal does not work effectively.

### You are more likely to develop a blockage of wax in your ear canal if:

- you use cotton buds to clean inside your ears, as this pushes the wax deeper into the ear canal
- you wear a hearing aid, ear plugs or use in-ear speakers for smart phones, as these can all interfere with the natural conveyor belt process of wax expulsion
- you have very narrow ear canals
- you have a particularly hairy ear canal
- you are older, because the earwax you produce is drier and harder
- you have a dry skin problem, such as eczema or psoriasis.

Keeping your ears dry will help. The easiest way to keep your ears dry when bathing/showering is by using good quality cotton wool smeared in Vaseline/ petroleum jelly.

## Advice to help you manage and prevent earwax blockage

Earwax only becomes a problem if it causes deafness or discomfort, or if your health professional needs to have a clear view of your eardrum.

**If you experience any of the following symptoms seek advice from the nurse at your GP practice:**

- pain
- discharge or bleeding from your ear
- sudden deafness or buzzing sound
- foreign bodies in your ear
- dizziness

If you are not experiencing any of these symptoms, you can manage the blockage by following the advice below.

## How to remove earwax

**Note:** Do not try to clean your ear canal with cotton wool buds. These can make things worse, as you may push the earwax deeper inside, making you feel temporarily deafer. Cotton buds can also disrupt your ear's self-cleaning system, cause an ear infection or cause damage to your ear canal or eardrum.

Olive oil ear drops will clear most blockages of earwax.

Put 2 or 3 drops of ordinary olive oil into your affected ear canal 2 or 3 times a day, for 2 to 3 weeks. This softens the wax, so it can run out of its own accord without harming your ear. You can continue to do this for any length of time, but 3 weeks is usually enough. Surprisingly, the wax blockage will often come out unnoticed.

**Please see over the page for full instructions.**

