



EARWAX - CERUMEN

What is it?

Earwax (cerumen) is produced by follicles and glands that line the ear canal. This yellow brown waxy oil material protects the ear by trapping dust, debris, bacteria, and foreign particles; preventing them from damaging the eardrum. The earwax is normal and is made of chemicals, which both moisten the ear canal and kill germs.

Why is Earwax a problem?

Earwax becomes a problem when it blocks the ear opening and causes a hearing loss. For some people, the ear canal produces more wax or thicker wax than the ear can naturally secrete. The aging process seems to thicken the earwax. Earwax blockage can cause hearing loss (temporary), noises in the ear (ringing or tinnitus), ear pain or a fullness or pressure sensation in the ear. Any wax buildup in the ear canal can predispose the canal to become infected. Patients that wear hearing aids often have more earwax impaction.

Q-tips, bobby pins, keys or other instruments should never be placed in the ear. They can worsen the problem by pushing the wax further into the ear canal and even push it against the eardrum. They can also cause damage to the ear canal or put a hole in the eardrum. This can damage the bones of your ear or the inner ear itself resulting in permanent deafness, dizziness and ringing.

How is Earwax treated?

In many cases earwax blockage can be treated at home. Using ear drops (mineral oil/sweet oil/olive oil) can help to soften the wax and allow it to come out on its own. Over-the-counter products such as Debrox, Murine Eardrops or diluted hydrogen peroxide can be used as well, but they are chemicals, which must be thoroughly removed from the canal to prevent potential ear canal damage. If used repeatedly, these solutions may cause irritation of the ear canal skin. Home remedies such as “candling” maybe dangerous and cause damage to the ear drum. **Never place any non-prescribed eardrops into the ear if there’s a hole in the eardrum. If in doubt, you must have an examination by your physician first.**

When is an office visit necessary?

Call your physician when you are having symptoms and the above methods do not work or new symptoms such as drainage, ear pain, fever or persistent hearing loss occur. Your physician has the benefit of directly visualizing the ear canal and removing wax in a safe and gentle manner. To clean the ear canal, your physician may use a variety of instruments including suctioning, cures, and irrigation.

Prevention:

Use mineral oil/sweet oil/olive oil – While lying on your left side, place 4 drops into the right ear, wait 5 minutes, sit up and wipe off the excess. Do the same for the left ear.

Perform this once a day for 7 straight days. Perform this week of drops every other month (every 8 weeks).

- If your attempts at home are unsuccessful, call your physician for an appointment
- Do not use the oil if there’s a hole in the eardrum.

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