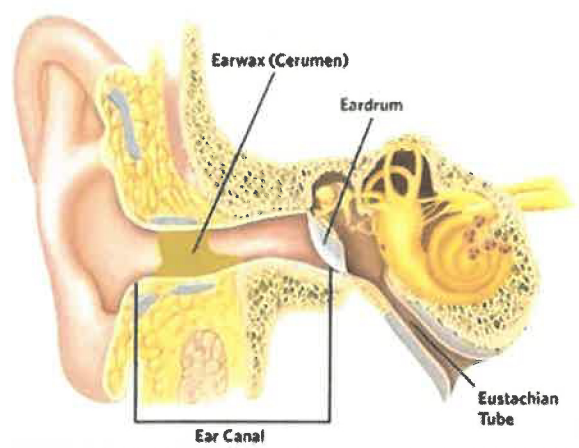


Cerumen (Earwax)

Cerumen, or “earwax,” is a naturally occurring substance that forms in the ear when glandular secretions mix with exfoliated skin. Its purpose is to clean, protect, and lubricate your external auditory canal. Normally, cerumen is eliminated or expelled naturally. If not, it can accumulate and obstruct the ear canal. Considered extremely common, cerumen blockages are easily addressed, but left unchecked can lead to a host of symptoms: hearing loss, tinnitus, fullness, itching, otalgia, discharge, odor, and cough. In addition, cerumen impaction can hinder diagnostic assessment of ear health and hearing.

To minimize occurrences and achieve the best outcome, please refer to these notes and recommendations:



Is it necessary to treat your ears to prevent accumulation?

Preventive measures are recommended for certain groups of people, yet not everyone needs it. Among these who may be helped are the elderly, people with hearing aids, and those with a history of excessive earwax.

What will happen if I leave my ears alone and do not clean them?

Most people do not need a regular schedule for prevention of earwax accumulation. Some may find it necessary to have a cleaning procedure performed occasionally. Earwax is formed naturally by your body and helps protect your ear canal skin and kill germs. A doctor may find an excess of earwax at a regularly scheduled general checkup and perform a cleaning procedure.

What symptoms could be caused by excessive earwax?

Common complaints include itching, hearing problems, or a sense of fullness in the ear canal. Other problems that might occur include discharge, odor, cough, or ear pain.

Does it hurt to remove earwax?

The procedures used to remove earwax should not cause any pain. If you are putting a type of liquid into the ear, it may feel funny but should not hurt.

If earwax is removed, will my hearing get better?

The type of treatment used to prevent the buildup of wax in your ear should not usually affect your hearing. If your ear canal is completely or almost completely blocked by excess earwax, then removing the wax will allow your hearing to return to pre-impaction levels.

How often should I remove wax from my ears?

There is no standard procedure for preventing earwax buildup, and for most people, nothing needs to be done unless excess wax develops. Ask your health care provider if there is anything special that you should do to prevent or reduce accumulation of earwax. There are several procedures with different periods for the treatment.

Do cotton-tipped swabs remove wax from the ear?

Cotton-tipped are not recommended for wax removal. Swabs can remove some material, but they often simply push the wax deeper into the ear and may worsen an impaction or traumatize the ear canal.

(continued on back)

Cerumen (Earwax)

DO

- ◆ Understand cerumen is normal. Earwax *NOT* causing symptoms or blocking the ear canal should be left alone.
- ◆ Understand symptoms of cerumen impaction (wax blocking the ear): decreased hearing, fullness, tinnitus, and distortion/changes to hearing aid function.
- ◆ Seek medical evaluation if you have symptoms of hearing loss, ear fullness, and ear pain.
- ◆ Ask your provider about ways that you can treat your cerumen impaction at home. You may have certain medical or ear conditions that may make some options unsafe.
- ◆ Seek medical attention with ear pain, drainage, or bleeding. These are not symptoms of cerumen impaction and need further evaluation.

DON'T

- ◆ Overclean your ears. Excessive cleaning may irritate the ear canal, cause infection, and even increase the chances of cerumen impaction.
- ◆ Put anything smaller than your elbow in your ear. Your mother was right! Cotton swabs, hair pins, car keys, toothpicks . . . these can all injure your ear and may cause a laceration in the ear canal, a perforation in the eardrum, and/or dislocation of the hearing bones, leading to hearing loss, dizziness, ringing, and other symptoms.
- ◆ Use ear candles. There is no evidence that they remove impacted cerumen, and candling can cause serious damage to the ear canal and eardrum.
- ◆ Irrigate or try cerumen-removing/softening drops if you have had ear surgery or a perforated eardrum, unless specifically cleared to do so by your otolaryngologist (ear, nose, and throat surgeon).
- ◆ Forget to clean your hearing aids as the manufacturer and your hearing health professional recommend.