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**NHS**

**West Suffolk  
Clinical Commissioning Group**

# Earwax build-up

## Self-care



## Excessive Earwax build-up

Ear wax is normal and is produced to form a protective coating in the ear canal. Ears are normally self-cleaning - the movement of your jaw whilst eating and talking helps to move the wax along the canal where it will usually fall out naturally without you noticing. However, wearing hearing aids, ear plugs or ear-phones, can prevent this natural clearing and cause a build-up. If you are concerned that you may have wax build up your audiologist or pharmacist will be able to assess and advise treatment.

**Important: Don't use your fingers or any objects like cotton buds to remove earwax. This will push it in and make it worse.**

### How you can treat excessive earwax build-up yourself

You can use sodium bicarbonate to try and dissolve the wax yourself. You should buy sodium bicarbonate ear drops from your local pharmacy. **Please don't use any sodium bicarbonate you find in your kitchen cupboard.** The following should be done twice daily, as and when needed, for two weeks.

- Lie on your side with the affected ear uppermost
- Pull the outer ear gently backwards and upwards to straighten the ear canal
- Put 2-3 drops of sodium bicarbonate into the affected ear and gently massage just in front of the ear
- Stay lying on your side to allow the solution to soak in for around five minutes
- Afterwards, wipe away any excess solution but do not plug your ear with cotton wool as this simply absorbs the solution

In most cases, the wax will have dissolved sufficiently after seven days without the need for further intervention. If you experience dryness or irritation after using bicarbonate of soda applying olive oil can help alleviate this. However, if you feel your hearing is still impaired, speak to your pharmacist. They may be able to suggest additional treatments.

### Earwax and hearing aids

Hearing aid users are at high risk for excessive ear wax build-up. The presence of a foreign object in the ear seems to stimulate more wax production by the cerumen glands. Hearing aids need to be cleaned daily, allowed to dry overnight and cleaned with a brush in the morning to remove wax and debris. Failure to follow this cleaning step will reintroduce wax and debris into the ear and will prevent the aid from working effectively. For further information, you should contact your audiologist or visit a high street hearing care center, such as Boots Hearingcare or Specsavers.

### When to see a nurse at your GP practice

- If you have tried the above methods and your ear hasn't cleared
- If your ear is badly blocked and you can't hear anything

**Important: Not all GP practices remove earwax, some can:**

- Flush the wax out with water (ear irrigation)
- Suck the wax out (microsuction)

These treatments are usually painless but are not always carried out at GP practices. You may have to pay to have them done privately.

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