



# EAR WAX

## Self-help guide

### **From March 2020, due to COVID-19, Ear irrigation (ear syringing) will no longer be available.**

We are committed to providing best practice and high quality medical care to our patients. Ear syringing is no longer considered to be the first line treatment for the clearing of ear wax and it is not a funded service within the NHS for General Practice.

Current guidelines are that ear drops should be used to soften the wax which will then enable the natural movement of the wax from the ear.

In line with current best practice, many other GP surgeries nationwide and current COVID-19 guidelines, Denmead Health Centre will no longer offer ear syringing.

### **Facts about Ear Wax**

- Ear wax is normal and provides protection for your ears.
- Your ears are self cleaning, and the movement of your jaw while eating or talking moves the way along the ear canal.
- Ear wax only becomes a problem if it causes deafness, pain or if a health professional needs a clear view of the ear drum.

### **Ear Irrigation**

- Ear irrigation/syringing can lead to ear infections, perforated ear drums and tinnitus [persistent noise]. It is not a requirement to provide this service in General Practice.
- Your pharmacist can help with earwax build up.
- They can give advice and suggest suitable

### **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 or hairy canals
- If you are elderly, the wax can be hard or dry.
- Dry skin in people who suffer with psoriasis or eczema

### **What you shouldn't do: some suggestions!**

- Do not use cotton buds to clean the ear. This forces the wax deeper into the canal and can cause damage, trauma and possible infection.
- Do not use objects such as matches, hair grips, crochet hooks, knitting needles, keys etc. this can cause trauma and possible infection.
- If your ears are itchy do not scratch or rub them with your finger nails or any other objects.

### **When to see the GP or Advanced Practitioner:**

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

### **Ongoing Self-care**

- If your ears are regularly becoming blocked with wax, after clearing the blockage, it may be helpful to use eardrops once a week or fortnightly to keep the wax soft and encourage the natural process of wax expulsion.

### **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.
- If you regularly get blocked ears, use ear drops weekly/fortnightly to soften the wax.

### **What can YOU do to manage the problem?**

- If you are **not** experiencing **any** of the aforementioned symptoms, the following is recommended:
- **Drops/Spray** - 2/3 times daily for 3 weeks.
  1. Lie on your side with the affected ear uppermost.
  2. Pull the outer ear gently backwards and upwards to straighten the ear canal.
  3. Put 2-3 drops into the affected ear(s) and gently massage just in front of the ear.
  4. Stay lying on your side for 10 mins to allow the wax to soak up the drops.
  5. Afterwards, wipe away any excess but **do not** plug your ear with cotton wool - this simply absorbs the drops.
  6. Your hearing problem may initially worsen after first starting the drops; this is why you are advised to treat one ear at a time.
  7. In most cases, the wax will have softened enough to encourage the wax to come out without intervention.
  8. However, if you feel your hearing is still impaired, please contact the practice nurse for further advice.