Heath Lane Medical Centre

Our aim is to help you live a healthy life.
We will do this with respect, a smile and a positive
attitude!

Ear Wax Self-Help Guide

Ear syringing will no longer be available at Heath Lane Medical Centre from May 2021. We are committed to providing best practice and high quality medical care to our registered 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. Further information and treatment options are available in this leaflet. In line with current best practice and many other surgeries nationwide ,Heath Lane Medical Centre has made the decision to withdraw the ear syringing service we have previously provided.

What is ear wax?

Ear wax is a build- up of dead cells, hair, foreign material such as dust and cerumen. Cerumen is the natural wax produced by glands in the ear. It forms a protective coating of the skin in the ear canal. Small amounts are made all the time. Flakes or crusts of earwax break off and fall out of the ear from time to time.

Points to remember

• Ear wax is normal and it provides protection for your ears.

• Your ears are self- cleaning.

• The movement of your jaw whilst eating and talking helps to move the wax along the canal.

• A plug of earwax is not a serious problem. You only need to remove earwax if it is causing symptoms such as dulled hearing or when fitting a hearing aid. 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 head phones can interfere with wax expulsion.

• Narrow and/or hairy ear canals.

• If you are elderly - the wax produced may be harder and drier.

• Dry skin in people who suffer with eczema or psoriasis.

What you should not do

• Do not use a cotton bud to clean your ear. This forces the wax deeper into the canal and can cause damage, trauma and possible infection.

• If your ears are itchy do not scratch or rub them with your finger nails or any other objects.

• Do not use anything smaller than your elbow in your ear!

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.

• Some people are troubled by repeated build- up of earwax and may benefit from regular use of ear drops.

What you can do to manage the problem?

Using ear drops- Ear drops alone will clear a plug of earwax in most cases. Put 2 or 3 drops of ordinary olive oil down the ear using a 'dropper' 2 or 3 times a day for 2-3 weeks. This softens the wax so that it then runs out of its own accord without harming the ear. You can continue for any length of time, but 3 weeks is usually enough. Surprisingly, you will not necessarily see wax come out. It often seems to come out unnoticed. If olive oil does not work you can buy sodium bicarbonate drops from your local pharmacy.

Don't use any ears drops if you have a hole in your eardrum (called a perforated eardrum).

How to use ear drops:

1. Warm the drops to room temperature before using them

2. Pour a few drops into the affected ear

3. Lie with the affected ear uppermost when putting in drops

4. Stay like this for 10 minutes to allow the drops to soak into the earwax

Preventing earwax build-up

You can't prevent earwax. It's there to protect your ears from dirt and germs. However, you can keep using ear drops to soften the wax. This will help it fall out on its own and should prevent blocked ears. If you are prone to repeated wax built up you can continue to use olive oil drops twice a week to prevent recurrence.

Alternatively

There are now a number of over- the- counter kits available from pharmacies. These contain a wax softener as drops which you use for 3-4 days and a small bulb syringe to enable you to remove the wax from your ear canals yourself. These kits can be easily purchased from your local pharmacy or online by searching 'ear wax bulb syringe'

The specially designed ear syringes are designed to create enough pressure to clear wax out of the ear without causing damage to the ear drum. It is very important to use hand- temperature, tepid body temperature water for this process having used olive oil or the drops in the previous days. Always follow the instructions provided with the kit. **Research shows that bulb syringing is effective and acceptable to patients and could significantly reduce the use of NHS resources.**

Ear irrigation (ear syringing)

Ear irrigation is no longer recommended as first line treatment for blocked ears. Ear syringing can lead to ear infections, perforated ear drum 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 the treatment.

If you have ear symptoms that concern you, please book an appointment to see the Nurse or GP at the Practice.

Microsuction

This is the preferred treatment if drops haven't worked. This is a suction technique which uses a microscope to magnify the ear, making it easier to assess and treat. A suction device is used to clean the ear without the use of water which is a much safer technique .This is available at various private clinics and places like Specsavers and Boots .

When to seek help from a health professional?

If you are experiencing the following symptoms:

• Pain

• Discharge or bleeding from the ear

• Sudden deafness

• Dizziness

• Foreign bodies (you may be advised to attend A&E)

• After using eardrops for the recommended time your symptoms **still** persist

Your GP or practice nurse will look inside your ears to check if they're blocked and might carry out some simple hearing tests. You may be referred to the ENT department of your nearest hospital for more specialised treatments.

Further information available:

www.nhs.uk/symptomchecker

https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/earwax-build-up/