

Ear Wax

The wax in your ear is secreted by glands in the skin that lines your ear canal. Earwax (cerumen) is part of your body's natural defenses. This wax protects your ear canal by trapping dirt and slowing the growth of bacteria which could damage the deeper structures in your ear.

A small amount of earwax regularly makes it way to the opening of the ear where it is washed away or falls out. If excessive wax is secreted or not cleared effectively the wax may accumulate. The blockage can cause an earache and/or decreased hearing.

Your health care practitioner can examine your ears to see if you have wax buildup.

If you have had past ear surgery, a hole perforation) in the ear drum or have pain or drainage from your ear do not attempt to remove ear wax with any device placed into your ear.

Never attempt to dig out excessive or hardened earwax with items such as a paper clip, a cotton swab or a hairpin. You may push the wax further into your ear and do serious damage to the lining of your ear canal and even to your eardrum.

If your eardrum does not contain a tube or have a hole in it, these simple self-care measures may help you remove excess earwax that is blocking your ear canal:

- Use an eyedropper to apply a few drops of baby oil, mineral oil, glycerin or hydrogen peroxide in your ear canal twice a day for several days. This will soften the wax.
- After a day or two when the wax is softened, use a 3-ounce rubber-bulb syringe to gently squirt warm water into your ear canal. Tilt your head and pull your outer ear up and back to straighten your ear canal. When finished irrigating, tip your head to the side to let the water drain out.
- When finished, dry your outer ear with a towel. Dry your inner ear by applying one full eyedropper of rubbing alcohol, then tipping your head to the side to drain the alcohol.

You may need to repeat this wax-softening and irrigation procedure several times before the excess earwax falls out. However, the softening agents may only loosen the outer layers of the wax. If your symptoms don't improve after several treatments, see your doctor.