

Earwax build-up

Ear irrigation, also known as ear syringing, is no longer recommended as a first line treatment for blocked ears. Ear irrigation can lead to ear infections, perforated ear drum and tinnitus which is a persistent noise.

How to tell if your ear is blocked with earwax

You can have:

- earache
- difficulty hearing
- itchiness
- dizziness
- an ear infection
- sounds such as high-pitched tones coming from inside the ear ([tinnitus](#))

How you can treat earwax build-up yourself

Olive oil ear drops are recommended, and these can be purchased from your local pharmacist. Ear drops should be administered 2-3 times a day instilling 4-5 drops in the affected ear for 7 to 10 days but can be continued for up to 3 weeks.

A pharmacist can help with earwax build-up

Speak to a pharmacist about earwax build-up. They can give advice and suggest treatments.

They might recommend chemical drops to dissolve the earwax. The earwax should fall out on its own or dissolve after about 7 to 10 days.

Do not use drops if you have a hole in your eardrum (a perforated eardrum), contact your GP for advice.

When to see a GP or nurse

- If your ear hasn't cleared after 3 weeks
- Your symptoms worsen
- Your ear is badly blocked, and you can't hear anything (you can get an infection if it isn't cleared)

Preventing earwax build-up

You can't prevent earwax. It's there to protect your ears from dirt and germs.

But you can keep using eardrops (olive oil) to soften the wax. This will help it fall out on its own and should prevent blocked ears.

Causes of earwax

You might have earwax build-up because:

- you just have more wax in your ears – some people do naturally
- you have hairy or narrow canals (the tubes that link the eardrum and outer ear)
- of your age – wax gets harder and more difficult to fall out
- of hearing aids, earplugs and other things you put in your ear – these can push the wax further in

Once the earwax is removed, these symptoms usually improve. If they do not, speak to a doctor or nurse at your GP practice.

Further information can be found on the NHS webpage: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/earwax-build-up/>

References:

- Self -Care for Ear Wax Removal, The Northern Care Alliance NHS Group Ref PI(DS)674, published September 2020
- www.pat.nhs.uk/hmr-ear-care-service.htm