

Cleaning the Ears

Community Paediatric Audiology Service



Our ears are designed to:

- **Clean themselves**
- Protect the delicate parts inside

If you try to “clean” your ears, you risk causing injury or infection to delicate parts inside the ear.

Earwax

- **is nature’s way of safely cleaning the ear**
- coats the outer third of the ear canal
- can be yellow, brown or black in colour
- can be dry and flaky or moist and sticky
- should NOT smell nasty

Earwax is designed to

- **repel water**
- stop the ear canal from getting dry and itchy by keeping the skin moist
- protect the ear from infection
- trap dust and germs – keeping them from reaching the eardrum

How does it work?

Earwax builds up inside the ear canal. It dries and moves outwards, bringing trapped dust with it. It usually falls out on its own even if you don’t see it.

It is a natural process - it doesn’t need your help!

Babies and small children

- often have very efficient self-cleaning ears
- often appear to produce a lot of earwax

Earwax coming out of the ear:

- is natural
- is nothing to worry about
- is **NOT** a sign of a ‘dirty’ ear
- **IS** a sign of a good self-cleaning ear

DO

- If the outsides of your ears get dirty, wash them carefully using a soft face-cloth with soap and water
- If you are washing your baby's ears, use cotton-wool balls dampened with plain water – no soap
- Pat the ears dry when finished

DON'T

- Don't poke things into the ear canal
 - NO COTTONBUDS
 - NO FINGERS
 - NO FACE-CLOTHS
 - NO SHARP OBJECTS
- you risk injuring the delicate skin or making a hole through the eardrum
- you risk pushing the wax deeper into the ear
- you risk interrupting the ears' own cleaning process
- you risk causing the earwax to block the ear which can result in discomfort, temporary hearing loss, and require an Ear Specialist to remove it

Remember

Removing the ear's protective wax layer, scratching the skin in the ear canal, and/or pushing wax in deeper can increase the risk of an infection.

- LEAVE THE INSIDES OF YOUR EARS ALONE
- DON'T POKE ANYTHING INTO THE EAR
- DON'T BE CONCERNED ABOUT EARWAX

For further information about this service contact:

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If you require this information in a different format such as in large print or on audio tape, or in a different language please contact the service on the details above.

If you have any compliments about this service or suggestions for improvements, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service on 0300 131 1000 (charges may apply depending on your network) or email: ccs-tr.pals@nhs.net.

For free, confidential health advice and information 24 hours a day, 365 days a year please contact NHS 111.