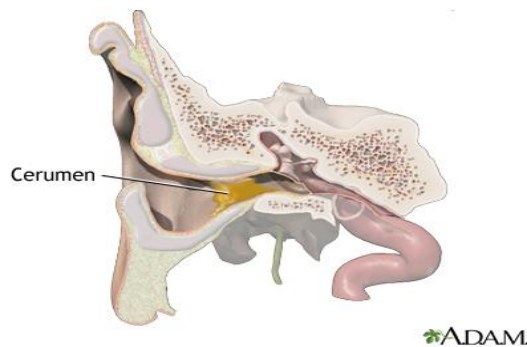


Earwax

What is earwax?

The ear canal has glands that produce a waxy oil (called cerumen) in the outer portion of the canal. This wax moves towards the ear opening and out of the ear to where it can fall out or be washed away. It may also contain dead skin cells and hair. Sometimes wax can build up and block the canal, especially if the canal has a hearing aid or a hearing aid mould that stops the wax easily escaping.

Earwax colour varies - it can be brown, orange, red, yellowish, grey and/or black. In some people the glands produce more wax than can easily come out. This extra wax may harden in the canal and block the ear.



Earwax protects the ear

- Trapping and preventing dust, bacteria, and other germs and small objects from entering and damaging the ear
- Protecting the delicate skin of the ear canal from getting irritated when water is in the canal.

How to prevent earwax build-up

You cannot prevent earwax - it's there to protect your ears.

But regularly using olive oil will help soften earwax build-up. This will help it fall out on its own and should stop the ears getting blocked.

How to deal with earwax build-up

We do **not** recommend that you try to reach into your ear to clean it because you are likely to push some of the wax deeper and block the ear canal.

Earwax usually falls out on its own, but if it does not, and builds up and blocks an ear, you can try to remove it, as follows: -

1. Lie on one side with the affected ear facing up.
2. Put 2 to 3 drops of olive or almond oil in the ear – do not use almond oil if you are allergic to almonds.
3. Continue lying on your side for 5 to 10 minutes after putting in the oil.
4. Repeat 1 to 4 times a day, for 5 to 10 days; this will soften the wax.
5. Put 2 to 3 drops of a **sodium bicarbonate solution*** in the ear which will help to lift the softened wax. Repeat 1 to 4 times a day for 2 days.

Over weeks, lumps of earwax should fall out of the ear. When treating both ears swap which ear is first.

***Note:** Sodium bicarbonate-based ear-drop products include Earex and Otex, both available from your local pharmacy.

Earwax

Important

Do not use your fingers or any objects, such as cotton buds, to remove earwax - this will push it in and make it worse. You should use cotton buds or swabs to only clean the outside of your ears.

There is **no** evidence that ear candles or ear vacuums get rid of earwax. These products are dangerous, ineffective, and only make things worse.

If You Need Professional Earwax Removal

- Check with your GP surgery first to see if they are still able to offer earwax removal services.
- The NHS cannot recommend specific private providers, but if you choose to go privately, make sure the practitioner is:
 - HCPC registered,
 - ACHS registered, or
 - A registered nurse trained in earwax removal.

Picture from MedLine Plus.