



EAR WAX (Cerumen)

What is earwax for?

- Glands in the skin of the outer part of the ear canal make earwax (also called cerumen).
- The wax traps dust and small particles to keep the ear clean.
- It also helps keep water out of the ears.

How can I clean my ears?

- The ears clean themselves of wax. You should not have to clean them.
- The wax builds up a little, then dries out and falls, or is wiped, out of the ear.
- Without wax, the ears become dry and itchy. A normal amount of earwax is healthy.
- Cotton swabs (such as Q-tips) are not recommended for cleaning.

What is earwax impaction?

- Impaction means that several layers of earwax have been pushed together and may be stuck in the ear.

What causes it?

- Normal wax builds up in the outer part of the ear canal, not near the eardrum.
- **If a patient has build-up near the eardrum, it is usually because the wax has been pushed there.**
- Patients who are trying to clean their ears with a cotton swab actually push the wax deeper into the ear.
- This not only can cause wax build-up, but it can injure the thin skin of the ear canal.

What are the signs and symptoms of it?

- Ears feel plugged.
- Partial loss of hearing.

How is it treated?

- You may try ear drops at home before calling a doctor.
- Eardrops soften the wax so it comes more easily out of the ear.
- Some drops can be found over-the-counter, such as Debrox or Murine Ear Drops. A mixture of 1 part hydrogen peroxide and 1 part water can also be used.
- You can use several drops twice a day.
- Tilt your head to one side and fill the ear canal using an eyedropper.
- Let soak in for a minute or two.
- Do this to the other ear if needed.
- Do this up to two times a day for 3 to 4 days.
- After 3 to 4 days, follow the same steps once a day.
- If impaction is a frequent problem, put 2 or 3 drops into each ear once a week.
- If home treatment doesn't work, call the doctor.

When should I call the doctor?

- If you or your child have tubes in the ears, call your doctor before using drops, oil, or peroxide to clean them out.
- If impaction is a frequent problem, ask the doctor to suggest ways you can prevent it.
- Call the doctor if impaction does not improve after 7 days of home treatment.