

# Patient Information Leaflet

## The Adam Practice

**Hamworthy Surgery**, 306 Blandford Road, Hamworthy,  
BH15 5JQ. Tel: 01202 679234

**Poole Surgery**, 117 Longfleet Road, Poole, BH15 2HX  
Tel: 01202 676111

**Upton Surgery**, Upton Cross, Poole, BH16 5PW  
Tel: 01202 622339

**Heath Cottage Surgery**, 40 High Street, Lychett Matravers,  
BH16 6BG. Tel: 01202 632764

**Email (for all sites):** [theadam.practice@dorset.nhs.uk](mailto:theadam.practice@dorset.nhs.uk)



THE ADAM PRACTICE

# Ear Care and Syringing

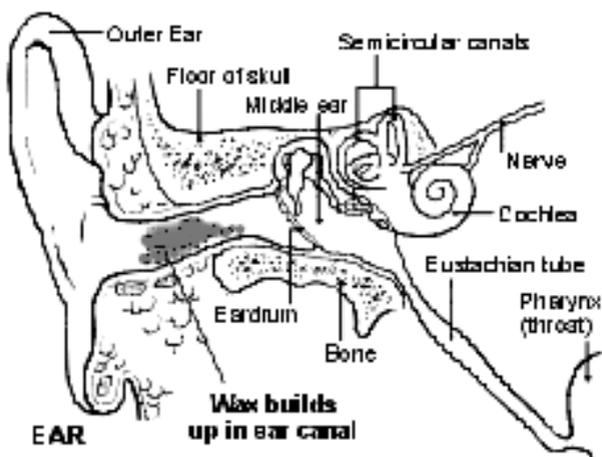
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[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) or [www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk)

**If there is a build up of wax in your ear(s) please read the following self-help guide as you may not need an appointment.**

## **WHAT IS EAR WAX?**

Ear wax is normal and is produced to form a protective coating over the skin in the ear canal. Ears are normally self-cleaning – the movement of your jaw whilst eating and talking helps to move the wax along the canal where it will usually fall out naturally without you noticing.



## **WHY IS MY EAR BLOCKED WITH WAX?**

The amount of ear wax produced varies from person to person; some people produce excessive amounts which can lead to a blockage in the ear canal.

You are more likely to develop a blockage of wax in the canal if you:

- ◆ use cotton ear buds to clean the ear as this pushes the wax deeper into the canal
- ◆ wear a hearing aid, ear plugs or use in-ear speakers for iPods or similar - as these can all interfere with the natural process of wax expulsion
- ◆ have abnormally narrow ear canals

- ◆ have a particularly hairy ear canal
- ◆ are elderly – because the ear wax you produce is drier and harder
- ◆ have a dry skin problem such as eczema or psoriasis

### **ADVICE TO HELP MANAGE AND PREVENT EAR WAX BLOCKAGES**

Ear wax only becomes a problem if it causes deafness, discomfort or if your health professional requires a clear view of your ear drum. Deafness is only caused when the entire canal is filled with wax and there is practically no reduction in hearing until this total blockage occurs.

If you experience any of the following, you should seek advice from a GP or Practice Nurse:

- ◆ pain
- ◆ discharge or bleeding from the ear
- ◆ sudden deafness or buzzing
- ◆ foreign bodies in the ear
- ◆ dizziness

If you are not experiencing any of the above, we recommend that you manage the blockage as follows:

### **OLIVE OIL DROPS**

The following needs to be carried out 2– 3 times daily for 14 days.

- \* Lie on your side with the affected ear uppermost
- \* Pull the outer ear gently backwards and upwards to straighten the ear canal
- \* Put 2-3 drops of olive oil into the affected ear(s) and gently massage just in front of the ear
- \* Stay laying on your side to allow the wax to soak in for around 10 minutes

Afterwards, wipe away any excess oil but do not plug your ear with cotton wool as this simply absorbs the oil.

## HEARING

Your hearing problem may initially worsen after first starting to use the olive oil drops; so we advise you to concentrate on treating one ear at a time if both ears are blocked with wax.

In most cases, after 14 days, the wax will have softened sufficiently to encourage the wax to come out without further intervention. However, if you feel your hearing is still impaired, please make an appointment with the practice nurse for further advice and management.

**Alternatively**, there are now a number of over-the-counter kits available from pharmacies. These contain a wax softener as drops which you use for 3-4 days and a small bulb syringe to enable you to remove the wax from your ear canals yourself. They can easily be purchased from your pharmacy or online by searching for 'ear bulb syringe' e.g. **Aculife Bulb Ear Syringe, Otex Express Combi pack, or Macks Wax Away Earwax Removal System**. The specially designed ear syringes are designed to create enough pressure to clear wax out of the ear without causing damage to the ear drum. It is very important to use hand-temperature, tepid body temperature water for this process having used olive oil or the drops in the previous days. Prolonged use of the drops in the over-the-counter preparations other than olive oil can cause irritation and soreness and should not be used for more than a few days at a time.

## EAR SYRINGING

This is only usually considered if the above recommendations have proved to be unsuccessful. Ear wax needs to be softened as above for 14 days before attempting to syringe. Although the risks are low and our nurses are specially trained to perform this procedure, there is still a small chance (thought to be around 1 in 1,000) of complications occurring - such as a perforated ear drum, middle ear infection, external canal infection or causing ringing in the ear (tinnitus).

If your ears are regularly becoming blocked with wax, after clearing the blockage we will usually suggest you use olive oil drops as above around once per week to keep the wax soft and encourage the natural process of wax expulsion.

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