

## How to remove earwax

Note: Do not try to clean your ear canal with cotton wool buds. These can make things worse, as you may push the earwax deeper inside, making you feel temporarily deafer or cause an infection.

### Using olive oil ear drops

Olive oil ear drops will clear most blockages of earwax.

1. warm the drops before using them (put a small bottle in your pocket for 10 minutes to warm them to body temperature).
2. lay on your side with your affected ear facing the ceiling.
3. pull the outer ear gently backwards and upwards, to straighten your ear canal.
4. put 2 or 3 drops of olive oil into your affected ear, then gently massage your ear.
5. stay like this for 5-10 minutes, to allow the drops to soak into the earwax.

Your hearing problem may become slightly worse temporarily after you start to use olive oil, so it is better to treat one ear at a time if both your ears are blocked.

If you get a repeated build-up of wax, you can continue to use olive oil drops twice a week. This will help keep the wax soft and encourage the natural process of wax expulsion

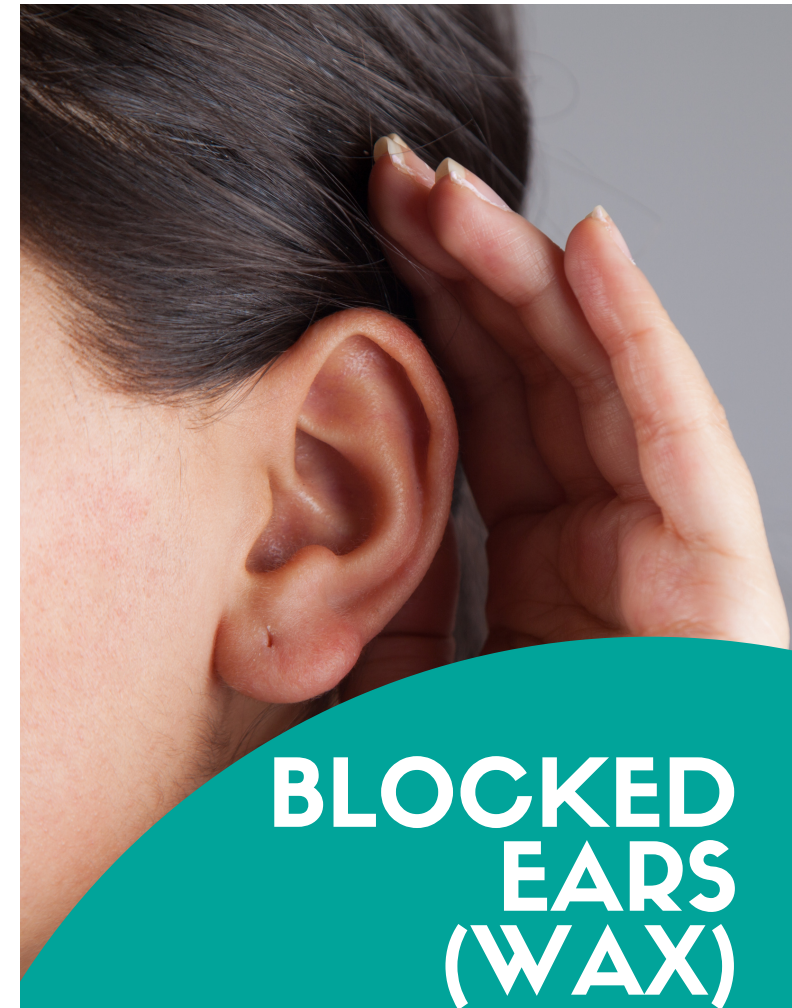
If you feel the olive oil is not working, you may prefer to use sodium bicarbonate 5% ear drops. You can buy these from most pharmacies and use them in the same way.

There are also wax softening sprays available to buy from most pharmacies; these are easy to use as you don't need to lay down when applying them.

In most cases, after 14 days the wax will have softened enough for it to come out.

If your ear hasn't cleared after this time, please contact your GP surgery for further advice.

Not all GP practices remove earwax. If you want to have your ears unblocked through micro-suction, you might have to pay privately.



A self-care guide for patients

For more information visit:  
[nhs.uk/earwax build up](https://www.nhs.uk/earwax-build-up)



## What is earwax?

Earwax is normal and produced to form a protective coating over the skin in the ear canal.

Ears are normally self-cleaning: the skin and tiny hairs in your ear canal act like a conveyor belt, bringing out any wax and debris naturally without you noticing.

This action is helped by the movement of your jaw when you chew and talk.

Experiencing an earwax blockage can be a nuisance but isn't a serious problem.

Ear syringing or irrigation is no longer routinely recommended as a method for treating earwax, due to the potential risk of complications.

## Why is my ear blocked with wax?

The amount of earwax produced varies from person to person.

Sometimes the conveyor belt motion in your ear canal does not work effectively.

## You are more likely to develop a wax blockage if:

- you use cotton buds to clean inside your ears. This pushes wax deeper into the ear canal.
- you wear a hearing aid, ear plugs or use in-ear speakers. These can interfere with the natural conveyor belt process of wax expulsion.
- you have very narrow or hairy ear canals
- you are older: the earwax you produce is drier and harder.
- you have a dry skin problem, such as eczema or psoriasis.

Keeping your ears dry when bathing or showering will help:

Use good quality cotton wool smeared in Vaseline/ petroleum jelly and insert into the outer shell of the ear before bathing.

## How to manage and prevent earwax blockage

Earwax only becomes a problem if it causes deafness or discomfort, or if your health professional needs to have a clear view of your eardrum.

If you experience any of the following symptoms seek advice from the nurse at your GP practice:

- **pain**
- **discharge or bleeding from your ear**
- **sudden deafness or buzzing sound**
- **foreign bodies in your ear**
- **dizziness**

