



THE ADAM PRACTICE

## **Patient Information Leaflet - Self Ear care & Ear Drop insertion**

### **What is Earwax?**

Earwax is a secretion of fats and oils produced in the outer ear, the clinical name for ear wax is Cerumen. The wax mixes with dead skin, hair and debris to clean the outer ear. Earwax is an essential component in maintaining a healthy ear canal.

### **Why do we have ear wax?**

Earwax helps to protect and clean the ear canal. The ear canal has dead skin and wax along its surfaces which moves outwards acting like a conveyor belt, this moves the wax to the entrance of the ear. Once the wax is visible, it is removed naturally whilst face washing or showering.

### **What Symptoms might you feel?**

If excessive wax is produced this can form a plug in the ear canal outside the ear drum. Although some people are asymptomatic, the most common symptoms from compacted earwax is hearing loss. However, these are some other common symptoms:

- blocked ears
- ear discomfort
- feeling of fullness in the ear
- earache
- tinnitus
- itchiness
- irritation of the ear canal leading to cough

### **Who suffers from excessive earwax?**

Anyone can suffer from a build-up of wax in the ear, young and old, people from all ethnic groups. It is however more likely to occur the older you get; men tend to suffer more than women. People who use cotton buds, or put anything in their ears (such as earphones) can damage the ears natural self-cleaning mechanism. This can lead to a build-up of wax.

### **How common is the problem?**

Impacted wax has been one of the most common problems seen in GP surgeries. It is a longterm problem for some people, however there are effective and safe ways to prevent and treat it. The ancient Egyptians used a mixture of olive oil, frankincense and salt to alleviate it. Today this common problem is easily treated, often by yourself, or in more severe cases by your practice nurse or aural care specialist.

### **How do you treat it?**

DO NOT use ear drops if there is any chance you have a perforated ear drum or grommets. There is no clear evidence to suggest the best type of ear drops, for everyone, or how frequently they should be used. Impacted earwax is very hard and dry so needs to be softened and lubricated to encourage the natural movement of wax from the outer ear.

1. Olive oil ear drops - Initially insert 1-2 drops into each ear twice a day with an ear dropper. Though not proven, this is the medical professional preferred method of treatment as it is harmless and often very effective. Carry out treatment for 10-14 days to see full effects.

2. Earol ear spray - This is a fine olive oil spray and is very good for those living alone. Please follow instructions thoroughly to ensure correct application of the spray.

3. Otex drops - These ear drops can be tried if the olive oil alternatives have been unsuccessful. The drops crumble and break down the wax allowing them to fall out of the ear canal more easily. These drops can cause discomfort so make sure to read instructions thoroughly before use.

4. Sodium Bicarbonate drops - Can also be used if the olive oil methods have failed to relieve the blockage. They dissolve the wax leading to easier removal of the excess wax from the outer ear. Again, these drops can cause discomfort so make sure to read instructions thoroughly before use.

### **If treatment has not worked after 10-14 days, what next?**

You should check with your pharmacist and ask their recommendation. Alternatively, here are a few short video clips to suggest some alternative ways of removing a build-up of ear wax. These methods will not be suitable for everyone so please make sure to read the contraindications of each method before testing.

1. Audiclean - <https://youtu.be/tDF7Wu9p9HI>
2. Neilmed Clear canal - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cUWHA0\\_iaLc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cUWHA0_iaLc)
3. Bulb syringe - Some people do find this very effective but there is little research currently available supporting this method...

There is no clear evidence to suggest when earwax should be removed so this recommendation is based on expert opinion [Sharp et al, 1990; Browning, 1994; Aung and Mulley, 2002; Guest et al, 2004; NHS Quality Improvement Scotland, 2006]

### **How to apply ear drops.**

1. Lie on your side with the affected ear upwards.
2. Gently pull the outer ear backwards and upwards. Using room temperature olive oil and the dropper, drop 1-2 drops in the ear canal and gently massage the front of the ear.
3. Remain lying down for 10 minutes and then wipe away any excess oil. DO NOT put any cotton wool inside your ear as this will absorb the oil.
4. Repeat this process with the opposite ear if necessary.
5. Continue to do this every night for 2-3 weeks and wax will eventually soften and move without any further intervention.

### **How to administer prescribed ear drops.**

1. Follow the instructions as for olive oil drops above.
2. You will need to use the drops more frequently than the olive oil drops. Please follow the
3. instructions on the bottle.
4. To see effects of the medication, ensure you complete the prescribed course.

### **For people who have had Mastoid surgery.**

The drops have to reach two areas; the ear canal, and the mastoid cavity.

1. Put the drops in as previously explained.
2. To ensure the drops reach the back of the mastoid cavity, lie on your back and insert 2-3 drops into the back of the cavity.
3. Remain in this position for 10 minutes and then wipe away any excess fluid (oil or antibiotic drops).

**If you are experiencing any ongoing difficulties, please contact your relevant surgery:**

**The Adam Practice**

Hamworthy Surgery, 306 Blandford Toad, Hamworthy, B15 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, Lytchett Matravers, BH16 6BG Tel. 01202 632764

For further information visit:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/qs185/chapter/Quality-statement-1-Earwax-removal>

Video showing insertion of Ear Drops: <https://youtu.be/65uAZr7TsAE>

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