

# Ear Wax Impaction

Minor Ailment

## What is ear wax impaction?

Ear wax buildup and blockage may cause a feeling of pressure in the ear, dizziness, partial hearing of certain tones, ringing in the ears and ear discomfort. However, pain is not a usual symptom of ear wax buildup and blockage.

If the ear wax is large enough to fully block your ear canal, you may experience hearing loss. This usually happens over a period of time. Ear wax buildup and blockage can happen to one, or both ears.

## What are the possible causes of this condition?

Ear wax is produced inside the ear canal by the glands just under the skin. It is responsible for lubricating the ear canal, preventing dust and bacteria from entering the middle ear. Normal ear wax will move towards the outer part of the ear canal and gets removed naturally from the ears.

If the ear wax builds up and hardens or becomes firmly lodged in the ear canal, it can cause partial or total blockage. The ear wax can expand when it comes into contact with water, which blocks up the ear canal. This can happen after a shower or swim.

Sometimes, your ear wax gets pushed deeper into the ear when cotton buds are used to clean your ear. Wearing hearing aids, ear plugs or in-ear phones for long periods of time worsen this issue and can cause ear wax impaction.

## What are the symptoms of ear wax impaction?

The symptoms of this condition can include the following:

- Sensation of plugged ears or ear fullness
- Hearing loss
- Ringing in the ears
- Ear itch
- Dizziness
- Dry cough
- Ear pain (uncommon)

## What can I do to treat ear wax impaction?

Ear wax impaction can be treated in the following ways and you can approach your pharmacist to get the following medications.

- Olive oil ear drops
- Mineral oil ear drops
- Docusate sodium ear drops
- Hydrogen peroxide ear drops
- Glycerol ear drops
- Saline solution

## When do I need to see a doctor?

Although ear wax can be treated without a doctor's consultation, there are times where the condition might be more serious.

If your condition does not get better after 5 days of treatment with ear drops or gets worse, you should see a doctor. You should also see a doctor if you experience any of the following:

- Abnormal ear discharge e.g. blood or pus
- Severe, sharp ear pain
- Severe itch in ear
- Dizziness or vertigo

You should not treat ear wax impaction by yourself if you have a history of perforated eardrums or have had ear surgery before.

## What else can I do to manage this condition?

Other than using medications to treat the condition, ear wax impaction can also be managed by the following methods:

- Use ear cleaning products that you can buy over the counter

The following are some suggestions to prevent ear wax impaction from happening again:

- Do not wear hearing aids, earplugs or in-ear phones for long periods of time
- Do not insert cotton buds, fingers or other instruments into your ear canal
- Clean and dry your ears with a dry cloth after a swim or shower
- Wear shower caps, swimming caps and waterproof earplugs when you are swimming or showering
- Use a cotton ball dipped in mineral oil and place in the external canal for 10 to 20 minutes once every week

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