

Tower House Medical Centre

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TYNTESFIELD
MEDICAL GROUP

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Backwell Medical Centre

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Long Ashton Surgery

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Blocked ears (earwax): Self Care

Earwax is a normal build-up of dead cells, hair, foreign material such as dust, and natural wax which forms a protective coating on the skin in the ear canal. The quantity of earwax produced varies greatly from person to person.

You only need to remove earwax if it is causing symptoms such as difficulty with hearing or prior to fitting a hearing aid. If earwax is not causing any symptoms, it should be left alone.

Do NOT try to clean the ear canal with cotton wool buds – this often simply pushes wax deeper into the ear canal and is one of the commonest causes of blocked ears.

If you are having symptoms due to earwax, there are some things you can do yourself to try to deal with this problem. **Ear syringing at the surgery is only appropriate if these measures have failed, or you are unable to undertake them.** Ear syringing can lead to ear infections, perforated ear drum and tinnitus (persistent noise) and therefore should be avoided if possible. If you think you have persisting wax despite taking the measures below, please make an appointment with one of our Health Care Assistants to discuss.

Our advice would be to treat one ear at any time.

Ear Drops

Ear drops alone will clear a plug of earwax in most cases. Put 2 or 3 drops of olive oil into the ear twice daily for 2-3 days (max 5 days). This softens the wax allowing it to clear without further intervention. You may not notice the wax come out; it often seems to come out unseen.

If you are prone to repeated wax build up, you can continue to use olive oil drops twice weekly to prevent recurrence. If olive oil does not work, you can buy sodium bicarbonate drops from pharmacies.

How to use ear drops:

1. Warm the drops to room temperature before using them
2. Pour a few drops into the affected ear
3. Lie with the affected ear uppermost when putting in drops
4. Stay like this for 10 minutes to allow the drops to soak into the earwax.

Bulb Syringing

Bulb syringing is a safe, alternate way to remove ear wax. Bulb syringes can be easily purchased from a pharmacy or online to allow you to clear the wax from your ears in your own home.

If your ears are painful or have fluid coming out of them, or if you have been told previously that you have a hole in your ear drum (perforation) or have recently had surgery on your ear, you should see a doctor or nurse and don't use this method.

Instructions for Bulb Syringing:

Use olive oil drops twice daily for up to 5 days prior to bulb syringing. Alternatively, sodium bicarbonate ear drops can be purchased from your pharmacy (please read the manufacturers leaflet.)

1. Wash your hands.
2. Use a bowl of cooled, boiled water that is warm to the touch, not too hot or too cold
3. Prepare the syringe by squirting water in and out of it a few times.
4. Gently pull your outer ear "up and out" to help straighten out the canal, which will allow better access for the water
5. Tilt your head so the ear to be treated is upmost.
6. Place the tip of the syringe into the opening of the ear. Do NOT push the syringe further into the ear. Gently squirt one or more bulb syringes of water into your ear.
7. Tilt your head to allow the water to remain in your ear for at least 60 seconds. Then tilt your head in the opposite side to allow the water to drain out.

If, after 3 weeks or more, you are still having symptoms, you will need to make an appointment with a nurse to decide what should be done.