



# PATIENT INFORMATION

## Shared Decision Making for Patients and Caregivers for Earwax Management

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS	OBSERVATION	EARWAX SOFTENING PRODUCTS	IRRIGATION	PHYSICAL REMOVAL
Are there any age limits?	No	Yes. Not recommended for ages below 3 years and in patients with non-intact ear drums.	No, but small children may be unwilling	No, but small children may be unwilling
What does it involve?	See provider every so often to check your ears.	Put a few drops of earwax softening products once or twice daily for 3 to 5 days.	Cleaning the ear canal with water to clear the earwax out of the inside of the ear	Earwax is physically removed by a provider in the office.
How long does the treatment take?	Time to look in the ear	Less than 5 minutes to put in drops	Should not take more than 30 minutes.	The treatment takes a few minutes and the patient will not be put to sleep.
What are the benefits?	Reduce unneeded treatment	Done at home, avoid clinician visits	Immediate improvement of symptoms caused by the earwax impaction  Self-irrigation can also be done at home	Immediate improvement of symptoms caused by the earwax impaction
What are the risks and side effects?	Small amount of earwax could progress to impaction	None reported	Temporary dizziness, pain, and/or hole in ear drum	Injury to the ear skin leading to bleeding, infection, or discomfort
What usually happens in the long term?	Nothing	Earwax may return and require additional treatment	Earwax may return and require additional treatment	Earwax may return and require additional treatment
Are there any special safety measures?	None at this time.	Should seek medical attention if too much pain or discomfort or loss of hearing is noticed.	May not be recommended for some patients.	Discuss physical removal of earwax with health care provider

**SOURCE:** Adapted from Schwartz SR, Magit AE, Rosenfeld RM, et al; Clinical Practice Guideline (Update): Earwax (Cerumen Impaction). *Otolaryngol Head Neck Surg*. In press.



**ABOUT THE AAO-HNS/F**

The American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery ([www.entnet.org](http://www.entnet.org)), one of the oldest medical associations in the nation, represents about 12,000 physicians and allied health professionals who specialize in the diagnosis and treatment of disorders of the ears, nose, throat and related structures of the head and neck. The Academy serves its members by facilitating the advancement of the science and art of medicine related to otolaryngology and by representing the specialty in governmental and socioeconomic issues. The AAO-HNS Foundation works to advance the art, science, and ethical practice of otolaryngology-head and neck surgery through education, research, and lifelong learning. The organization's vision: "Empowering otolaryngology-head and neck surgeons to deliver the best patient care."