



PATIENT INFORMATION

Frequently Asked Questions: Earwax Prevention

QUESTION	ANSWER
Should I do anything to my ears to prevent a buildup of earwax?	Your body makes earwax to protect your ear canal skin and kill germs. It is normal to have it. Prevention is best for certain groups of people, but not everyone needs it. Among those who may be helped are the elderly, people with hearing aids, and those with a history of too much earwax. Discuss with your health care provider to determine if you need to have earwax removed.
What will happen if I don't clean my ears?	Most people do not need a regular schedule for preventing earwax buildup. Some people may need to have their ears cleaned at times. Your health care provider may find that you have too much earwax at your regular check-up. You may be treated at that time or sent to another provider for treatment.
What symptoms could be caused by too much earwax?	Common complaints include itching, hearing problems, or a sense of fullness in the ear canal. Other problems that might occur include discharge, odor, cough, or ear pain.
Does it hurt to remove earwax?	The procedures used to remove earwax should not cause any pain. If you are putting a type of liquid into the ear it may feel funny, but should not hurt.
If earwax is removed will my hearing get better?	The type of treatment used to prevent the buildup of wax in your ear should usually not affect your hearing. If your ear canal is completely, or almost completely blocked by too much earwax, then removing the wax will allow your hearing to return to pre-blocked levels.
How often should I remove wax from my ears?	There is no standard course of action for preventing earwax buildup. Most people do not have to do anything unless too much wax develops. Ask your health care provider if there is anything you should do to prevent or reduce earwax.
Is removing earwax costly?	Most procedures use over the counter materials and are not expensive. Your health care provider can help with the choices.
Do cotton swabs remove wax from the ear?	Cotton swabs can remove some wax, but they often just push the wax deeper into the ear and may worsen an impaction or injure the ear canal.
Who can I see to clean my ears?	Many primary care doctors have the ability to irrigate earwax in their clinics. An otolaryngologist (ear, nose, and throat doctor) can remove obstructed earwax.

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



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