



PATIENT INFORMATION

Dos and Don'ts of Earwax (Cerumen)

DO	Know that earwax (cerumen) is normal. Earwax that does not cause symptoms or block the ear canal should be left alone.
DO	Understand symptoms of earwax impaction (wax blocking the ear): decreased hearing, fullness, ringing in the ear (tinnitus), and distortion/changes to hearing aid function.
DO	See your health care provider if you have symptoms of hearing loss, ear fullness or ear pain if you are not certain they are from earwax. Otitis media (fluid behind the ear drum), otitis externa (ear canal infection) and sudden inner ear hearing loss can seem like an earwax impaction.
DO	Ask your provider about ways you can treat your earwax impaction at home. You may have certain medical or ear conditions which may make some options unsafe.
DO	Seek medical attention if you have ear pain, drainage, or bleeding. These are not symptoms of earwax impaction, and need to be checked out by your health care provider.
DON'T	Over-clean your ears. Too much cleaning may bother your ear canal, cause infection, and may even increase the chances of earwax impaction.
DON'T	Put cotton swabs, hair pins, car keys, toothpicks, or other things in your ear. These can all injure your ear and may cause a cut in your ear canal, poke a hole in your ear drum, or hurt the hearing bones, leading to hearing loss, dizziness, ringing, and other symptoms of ear injury.
DON'T	Use ear candles. Ear candles do not remove earwax and can cause serious damage to the ear canal and drum.
DON'T	Ignore your symptoms if home remedies are not helping. Seek medical attention if your symptoms do not go away.
DON'T	Irrigate or try earwax-removing/softening drops if you've had previous ear surgery or a hole in your ear drum unless cleared to do so by your ear, nose, and throat surgeon (otolaryngologist).
DON'T	Forget to clean your hearing aids as the manufacturer and your hearing health professional recommend.

SOURCE: Adapted from Schwartz SR, Magit AE, Rosenfeld RM, et al. Clinical Practice Guideline (Update): Earwax (Cerumen Impaction). *Otolaryngol Head Neck Surg.* 2017;156(1_suppl):S1-S29.



AMERICAN ACADEMY OF
OTOLARYNGOLOGY-
HEAD AND NECK SURGERY

FOUNDATION

www.entnet.org

ABOUT THE AAO-HNS/F

The American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery (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."