

Focus on ear wax

What is earwax?

- Ear wax is a brown, grey or yellowish waxy substance produced by glands in the ear canal.
- It protects the skin, helps to clean the ear and lubricates the ear.
- It is normal and should not ordinarily cause any problems.
- A blockage happens when the wax gets pushed deep into the canal and/or fills the width of the canal.
- Symptoms of build-up of wax are; earache, partial hearing loss, feeling of fullness or feeling as if the ear is plugged up.

Self-care advice includes:-





- Do NOT use cotton buds as this causes the wax to be pushed deeper into the canal causing damage and possible infection.
- Do NOT scratch inside ears with fingernails or other objects such as hair grips.
- DO keep ears dry and avoid putting your head under water when bathing.
- Treat potential build ups timely to avoid further problems.

See the table below for self-care products. Ask your pharmacist for advice.

When to seek medical advice:

- If self-treatment has failed,
- If you experience pain
- Have discharge or bleeding from the ear
- Have sudden deafness
- Have a sore or inflamed ear canal
- Have or suspect a foreign body in the ear
- Have a history of ear problems, such as damaged ear drum
- If you are suffering from swimmer's ear

Examples of products available to purchase

	OTEX	CERUMOL	EAREX	BOOTS EARWAX REMOVER
				
How does it work?	Breaks hardened wax into pieces so it can fall from the ear more easily and naturally. Reduces the need for syringing.	Works by loosening the wax and lubricating the ear. Reduces the need for syringing.	Works by softening the wax and releasing oxygen to break up the hardened deposits.	Works by softening hardened ear wax and gently releasing oxygen to disperse it, reducing the need for syringing.
Instructions for use	Use up to 5 drops in the affected ear(s) 1-2 times a day for 3 to 4 days. Use warm water with the bulb syringe to wash wax away (optional).	Use up to 5 drops in the affected ear(s) twice a day for up to 3 days.	Use 3 to 6 drops in the affected ear(s) 1-2 times a day for 3 to 6 days or once weekly to help prevent earwax build up.	Use 5 drops in the affected ear(s) 1-2 times a day for up to 4 days. Use warm water with the bulb syringe to wash wax away (optional).
Where can I buy this?	Available off the shelf in supermarkets and pharmacies.	Any pharmacy over the counter.	Available off the shelf in supermarkets and pharmacies.	Available at Alliance Boots.
Not for use if.....	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You have a history of ear problems • Your ear drum is damaged • You suffer from dizziness • There is pain/swelling/discharge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You have a sore/inflamed ear canal • You have dermatitis or eczema on the outer ear • You have a perforated ear drum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You have a damaged or perforated ear drum • You have an infection • You have dermatitis or eczema of the ear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your ear drum is damaged or you suspect that it is • Your ear is inflamed or infected • You suffer from dizziness or ringing in the ear

Title	Focus on earwax
Author	Medicines Optimisation Team, Mid Essex CCG
Document location Website	Medicines Optimisation> Self-care
Document location Internal editable	Shared drive> Medicines guidance CURRENT> Self-care OTC resources
Approved by	Mid Essex Medicines Optimisation Group
Date approved	October 2017
Next review date	October 2022
Updated	Products updated August 2019