

EARWAX BLOCKAGE

(Cerumen Impaction)



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Overproduction of earwax (cerumen), causing blockage of the external ear canal. Wax is produced by glands in the ear to protect the canal leading from the eardrum to the outside. The amount of wax produced varies from person to person. Some produce so little wax that it never accumulates. Others produce enough to block the canal every few months.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Decreased hearing.
- Ear pain.
- Plugged feeling in the ear.
- Ringing in the ear.

CAUSES

Overproduction of wax by glands in the external ear canal.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Exposure to dust or debris.
- Family history of overproduction of earwax.
- Water in the ear, which can cause the wax to swell.
- Use of cotton swabs in an attempt to clean the ear canal.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Avoid areas where the air is dusty or filled with debris. This stimulates overproduction of earwax. Consider wearing earplugs if you must be in this type of environment.
- Monthly use of 1 to 2 drops of glycerin in the ear may soften the wax and prevent recurrent blockage.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Earwax can be removed, but stubborn cases require patience.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Ear infection.
- Eardrum damage.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

To remove earwax at home:

- Buy wax-softening ear-drops at a drug store.
- Lie down with the affected ear toward the ceiling.
- Pull the top of the ear gently up and back toward the back of the head.
- Instill the ear-drops as directed by the instructions on the package.
- Leave the drops in the ear for 20 minutes or as directed. Continue to lie down, if possible. Plug the ear with cotton.
- Sit up, leaning a little toward the affected side.
- Use a soft, rubber bulb syringe to irrigate the ear canal gently with plain warm water.
- Repeat irrigations until the ear feels clear. If the ear doesn't clear, call our office, so that wax can be removed using other methods.
- Don't try to remove wax with a stick or cotton swab. You may damage the eardrum or cause infection in the ear canal. Caution: If you have a perforated eardrum, don't try to remove wax; call our office.

MEDICATIONS

For minor pain, you may use non-prescription drugs such as acetaminophen.

ACTIVITY

No limits.

DIET

No special diet.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of an earwax blockage that does not clear, despite treatment described above.
 - A child younger than 4 has an earwax blockage.
 - Fever and ear pain accompany an earwax blockage.
- Do not irrigate the ear in this case.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page