



# THE HEARING CLINIC

*Bridgitte Harley Hearing Care Ltd*



## HAVING YOUR EARS CLEANED

Your journey to brighter hearing



# OUR AWARD WINNING TEAM

**Excellence** in Hearing **Health Care**



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# HAVING YOUR EARS CLEANED

Earwax, or cerumen as it is medically known, is a natural substance produced by the ear canal of humans and many other mammals.

The exact function of earwax is disputed, but earwax probably plays a role in the hygiene and overall health of the outer ear. In most people the presence of earwax goes unnoticed and is non-problematic. In some people, however, the amount of earwax inside the ear canal can become excessive and the earwax becomes impacted.

## This can be because:

- The skin lining the ear canal no longer migrates outwards when it sheds. Without this 'conveyor belt' motion, the earwax becomes trapped inside the ear.
- The anatomy of the ear canal does not lend itself to the migration of earwax, for example, because the ear canal is too narrow.
- The inappropriate use of cotton/ear buds, or regular wearing of hearing aids and earplugs can push the earwax deep into the ear canal.
- The glands on the skin lining the ear canal become hyperactive and secrete more earwax than normal.
- The earwax is hard and dry (a common issue for older people) and therefore more likely to become impacted in the ear canal.

*How do I know if I have problems with earwax?*



## Left untreated, excessive and/or impacted earwax can lead to:

- **Hearing loss**
- **A blocked sensation/occlusion:** internal sounds such as chewing, breathing, your heartbeat and your voice can no longer escape out of the ear due to the earwax. They are therefore heard more loudly inside your head
- **Tinnitus:** a ringing/whistling/buzzing sound that originates from inside your ear and is only heard by you
- **Vertigo:** some people can experience vertigo (spinning dizziness), which improves with the removal of the earwax
- **Coughing:** sometimes caused by irritation of the ear canal
- **Interference with hearing aid:** sounds being amplified by the hearing aid are reflected back out of the ear by the earwax. This causes acoustic feedback (whistling) of the hearing aid. Earwax can also block hearing aid tubes
- **Itchiness/irritation:** excess earwax can contribute to itchiness and irritation of the outer ear canal (otitis externa).

If earwax is causing any of these problems then its removal should result in an improvement.

**It's important to note that there may be other reasons for the issues above.**

# HOW DO I TREAT EARWAX PROBLEMS?

Earwax is not a problem for many people: it simply migrates out naturally and falls out of the ear. Often, there isn't even any need to clean the ear with earbuds. In fact, using earbuds may even lead to earwax being pushed further into the ear canal and becoming impacted.

*If earwax does cause problems for you, there are various ways to deal with it.*

## EARDROPS

Water-based (bicarbonate) or oil-based (olive oil) eardrops can help soften or disperse earwax. Water-based drops can dissolve earwax, while oil-based ones tend to soften the ear wax so it can be removed. If you have an eardrum hole/perforation avoid oil-based drops. Some water-based drops should be avoided too. Bicarbonate eardrops are not known to be dangerous but may be uncomfortable if you have an eardrum perforation. They may also trigger an infection.

## EAR SYRINGING (IRRIGATION)

Occasionally, syringing may be the only option to remove wax. However, it is generally no longer recommended for wax removal, particularly if you:

- have a perforated ear drum or a very narrow ear canal
- have had previous mastoid or middle ear surgery
- are prone to ear infections
- have had previous problems with ear syringing
- have sensitivity in your ears
- have moderate or severe tinnitus, which is made louder with noise exposure.

# ENDOSCOPIC EAR WAX REMOVAL

This technique uses an endoscope to see a magnified and significantly wider view of the external ear canal and eardrum. Instruments and suction are used to remove the wax. The procedure takes 10-15 minutes and is generally painless or causes only mild discomfort.

- **The procedure will usually take between 10 to 15 minutes.**
- **The procedure is generally painless or causes mild discomfort.**

Occasionally not all the earwax can be removed for example if it is hard. In this case it may be necessary to soften the earwax with some drops and return at a later date to have the ear cleared of earwax. If the earwax is hard and impacted softening of the earwax with eardrops (e.g. bicarbonate ear drops) will help its removal.

No single technique is 100% successful every time and in some people the combination of different techniques may be required to remove the wax e.g. ear drops to soften wax followed by removal with microsuction. Occasionally the earwax cannot be successfully removed. Assessment by your GP or an Ear Surgeon maybe required. It is usually not necessary or desirable/ safe to removal 100% of all ear wax from the ear canal. Any earwax left may not cause problems and migrate out naturally.

Sometimes earwax can be removed without any prior treatment. If there is a large quantity of hard earwax, removal can be difficult. Earwax, which is hard, can be softened with bicarbonate eardrops. This can be obtained from most pharmacists. Three to 4 drops can be applied 3 times a day (and left in place for 10 minutes while lying on your side) for 3 day prior to the wax removal. Bicarbonate eardrops can cause the earwax to expand blocking the ear canal. Once the ear canal has been cleared this sensation of blockage will resolve. Some people can have sensitive ear canals, which may be irritated by bicarbonate eardrops. An alternative such as olive oil drops can be used. We will recommend that you use olive oil in your ears for three days prior to your appointment.

**No single technique is 100% successful every time and sometimes a combination of different techniques may be needed to remove the wax. Very occasionally the earwax cannot be successfully removed and you may need to visit your GP or an ear surgeon for further investigation.**

# EARWAX TREATMENT - THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Ear wax removal is generally very safe, but occasionally problems can arise either immediately or within a few days of earwax removal.

If you experience any problems after the procedure, please call us promptly at The Hearing Clinic or see your GP without any delay.

## EARDROPS

Eardrops are not always effective, and bicarbonate eardrops can cause the earwax to expand blocking the ear canal. However, once the ear canal has been cleared, this sensation should resolve. In some people, eardrops can cause discomfort or trigger an infection.

## EAR SYRINGING

**Ear syringing can in some cases cause problems. These include:**

Ear canal infection (otitis externa). Ear syringing can cause a loud noise which in rare very cases causes hearing loss and tinnitus (ringing type noise in the ear). The eardrum may perforate, if already weak, causing ear pain, bleeding and in some cases hearing loss, tinnitus and dizziness. In cases of people with sensitive ears or significant tinnitus that is made louder with noise exposure, the noise from syringing may become uncomfortable.

## ENDOSCOPIC EARWAX REMOVAL

**Endoscopic earwax removal can also on occasions cause problems. These include:**

Ear canal damage. This can cause bruising, bleeding and pain. Sometimes an infection of the ear canal skin occurs. On very rare occasions this can lead to an infection of the bone around the ear canal and damage to the facial nerve resulting in facial weakness. If suction is used a loud noise can be generated in the ear canal. In some cases this can cause hearing loss and tinnitus. This is rare. It is extremely rare for the eardrum to perforate. If this does occur it can cause ear pain, bleeding and in some cases hearing loss, tinnitus and dizziness. The eardrum will, in most cases heal itself. Occasionally an operation may be required to repair the eardrum. In cases of people with sensitive ears or significant tinnitus that worsens with noise, the noise from suction may become uncomfortable. In rare cases people can develop tinnitus after the treatment. People with existing significant tinnitus which worsens with noise or ears sensitive to sound should avoid wax removal techniques, which generate noise (e.g. syringing or suction). The complications above can on rare occasions cause psychological and emotional distress.

# I STILL HAVE AN EAR PROBLEM AFTER EARWAX REMOVAL. WHAT SHOULD I DO?

There may be another reason besides earwax that is causing your ear to feel blocked. This may be due to problems behind the eardrum in the middle ear, such as fluid or glue ear. Your inner ear or hearing nerve may not be working properly. Please contact us or see your GP to have further investigations.

# HOW OFTEN DO I NEED TO HAVE MY EARS CLEANED?

Most people's ears clean themselves, but if your ear becomes blocked again, please get in touch and book your appointment with us.

# WHAT HAPPENS IF I DO NOT HAVE MY EARS CLEANED?

If earwax is not causing you any problems then the best thing is to leave your ears alone. If earwax is causing problems such as blockage or hearing loss, and the problem doesn't resolve itself, then it's important to get it seen to.





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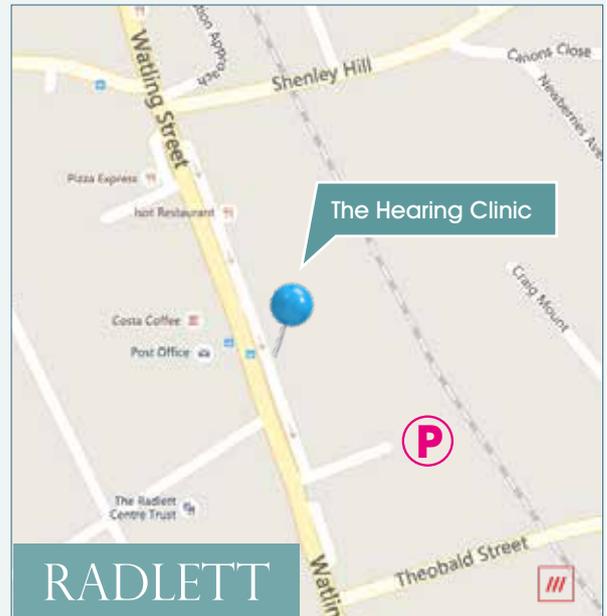
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