



2961 Summit Street • Oakland, CA 94609  
T: 510-465-0941 F: 510-271-4135

## Ear Wax and Ear Safety Tips

### Never put anything smaller than your elbow in your ear

If it's smaller than your elbow it doesn't belong in your ear, so the next time you reach for a cotton swab to remove ear wax heed this advice: don't! Since the ear drum is one of the most delicate tissues of the body it is easily injured. It is located deep inside the ear canal for its own protection. Using a cotton swab to remove wax or absent-mindedly playing with a bobby pin inside your ear can often push wax further down near the ear canal and block your hearing.

Ear wax is formed by glands in the skin of the outer part of the ear canal. The wax has a function of trapping dust and dirt. Usually the sticky wax accumulates these particles and then dries out. As the skin of the ear canal grows and renews itself the wax is carried to the outside. The ear wax falls out by itself, or it may be removed with a wash cloth and your finger. But if wax has accumulated in the ear canal and is blocking your hearing it may need to be removed.

A simple maintenance program can include directing the water stream water directly into the ear canal during your shower. If this is done on a regular basis, wax is unlikely to accumulate. If your wax is especially dry, you may want to soften it with oil. Use an eye dropper with either mineral oil or baby oil. It is best to instill a few drops of the oil at bedtime, allowing it to absorb overnight. This is also helps to control itching caused by dry skin. The needed frequency varies among individuals, but once every week or so is average.

Do not attempt to remove the wax yourself if you have a hole in your drum or if your ear is infected. A doctor will have to remove the wax for you in those cases. If you have a healthy ear which is otherwise blocked by wax take the following steps to remove the wax.

- Begin softening the wax for a few days before you try to remove it. Instill in your ear canal several drops of a wax softener such as "Debrox®" twice daily.
- Use bath temperature water and a bulb syringe. You may purchase these items separately, or there are commercially available wax removal kits at your drugstore.
- Lean over a sink, and with one hand pull the outer ear upwards and backwards while squirting the water into the ear with the other hand. When finished, turn and pull the ear downward to let the water drain. You may have to repeat the washing 10 or 20 times if the ear is still blocked. Watch for the wax to fall out.
- You may prevent "swimmers ear" by drying the ear with hair dryer. Avoid the temptation to use a cotton swab for this. As a further precaution, you may want to place an eye dropper full of a mixture of plain white vinegar with water (50/50). Instill this into the ear and let it drain out
- If you cannot clean out all the wax by yourself you will need an office visit.