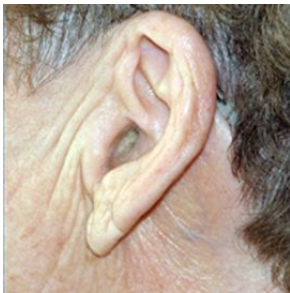


Earwax



Earwax is a protective coating over the skin that lines the inside of the ear.



Earwax has a number of jobs:

- It traps dirt
- It stops the ear from becoming too dry
- It pushes away water and germs.



Sometimes too much earwax can cause your ear to become blocked.



This can be very painful and it can also make it hard for you to hear properly.



Every year, in the UK, about 2.3 million people have problems with earwax and they need to have it removed.

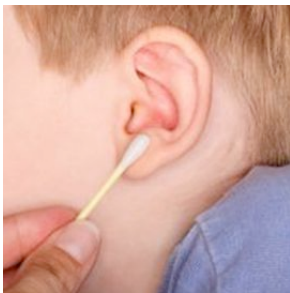


Some people just have an extra amount of earwax.



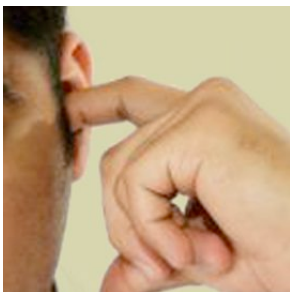
If you have too much earwax, there is more chance that it can cause you problems like blockages.

This is when your earwax gets stuck inside your ear.



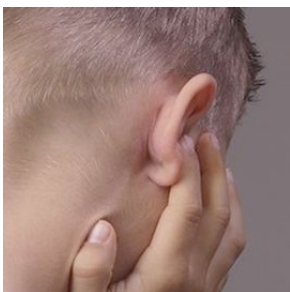
You may have a blockage if you use cotton buds or a hearing aid.

They stop the extra earwax falling out of your ear and can push it back inside.



It may feel as if you have something blocking your ear.

You may also have:



- Earache



- Tinnitus (noises in your ear, like a ringing or buzzing sound)



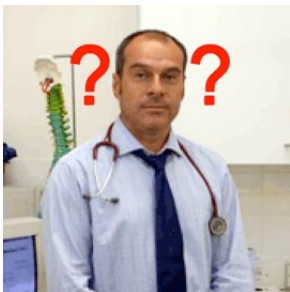
- Itchiness



- Vertigo (this is when you feel like you are spinning even when you are actually not moving)



- A cough



For some reason, it is quite common for people with learning disabilities to have problems with earwax.

Medical professionals do not know why this is.

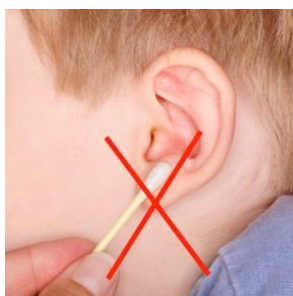


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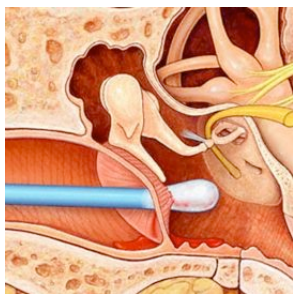
How to Avoid Problems



Do not put objects in your ears like cotton buds, matchsticks, or hair pins, as they can:



- Damage the inside of your ear.



- Create a blockage with the earwax, or make a hole in your ear drum.



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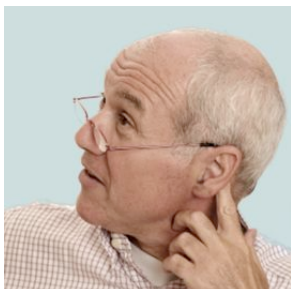
Finding Out You Have a Problem with Ear Wax



Your doctor, or a specialist, may look inside your ear with a tool called an **Auriscope**.



It will help them to see if you have extra wax or a blockage.



If your hearing has changed, it may be because of the earwax problem.



Ear blockages can be caused by lots of other things like:



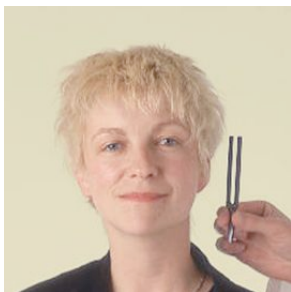
- Swelling or soreness inside the ear (from an allergy or infection)



- Putting things in your ear that should not be there



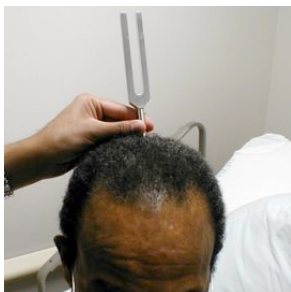
Your hearing can be tested using tools called 'tuning forks' :



Rinne test

The Rinne test is when a vibrating tuning fork is put at different places near your ear.

Your doctor will ask you to say which is the loudest place.



Weber test

In the Weber test, the vibrating tuning fork is put on the middle of your forehead.



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Treatment



In most cases, earwax falls out on its own.

(Then there is no need to get rid of the earwax).



But, if you have:



- Hearing loss



- Ear ache



- Tinnitus (noises in your ear)



- Vertigo (feeling like you are spinning when you are still)



- A cough

...the earwax may need to be removed.



Earwax may also need to be removed if you need a mould to be made for a hearing aid.

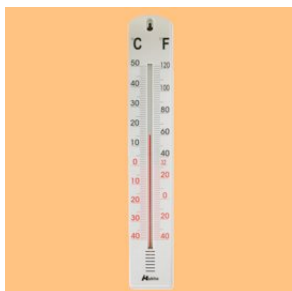


Earwax may also need to be removed if you have a hearing aid, and the earwax is making it whistle.

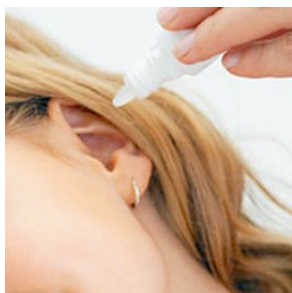


Your doctor may give you eardrops to soften your earwax.

They may be prescribed for 3-5 days to help soften the wax.



Eardrops should always be used when they are at room temperature.



Follow the doctor's instructions to pour a few drops into the blocked ear.

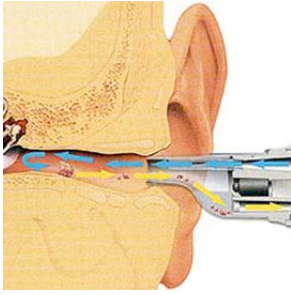


Lie on your side for a few minutes with the blocked ear facing up towards the ceiling.

This lets the eardrops soak into the wax and soften it.

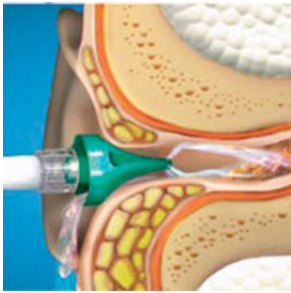


An action known as irrigation may be needed.



Irrigation is when the wax is washed out with a flow of water.

This removes the build-up of ear wax that is causing the blockage.



The health professional will squirt water into your ear.

This will clean out any extra earwax.



They will use an 'irrigator' to do this.

An 'irrigator' is an electric tool that pushes water into the ear.

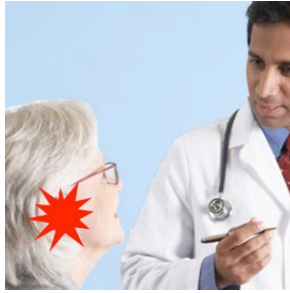


To make sure that the water jet reaches all areas, the person may hold your ear at different angles to do this.



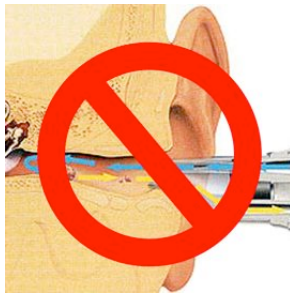
The health professional will look inside your ear a number of times.

This is to check if the wax is coming out.



The water jet should not hurt but it might give you a strange feeling in your ear.

If it hurts, you should tell the health professional and they will help you.

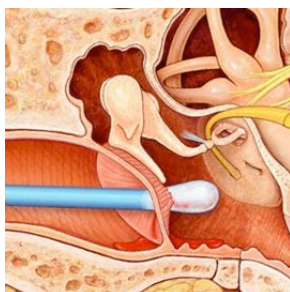


Ear irrigation is not suitable for everyone!

Ear irrigation should not be used if you have:



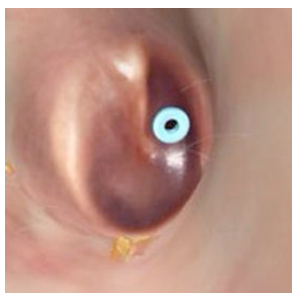
- Had problems with irrigation before



- Damage to the eardrum (or you have had this in the last year)



- A runny liquid coming from your ear



- A grommet (a small, empty tube)

It is put into your ear if you have lots of liquid that is giving you hearing difficulties.



- Had any ear surgery within the last year and a half



- A cleft palate (whether treated or not)



- An ear infection



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Other Ways of Removing Earwax



- **Micro-suction** – this is when gentle suction is used to get the earwax out



- **Aural toilet** – this is when the specialist uses a tool to remove the wax

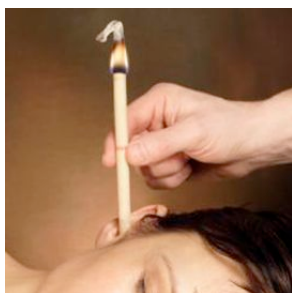


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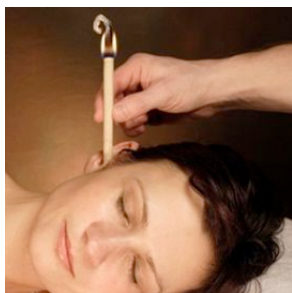
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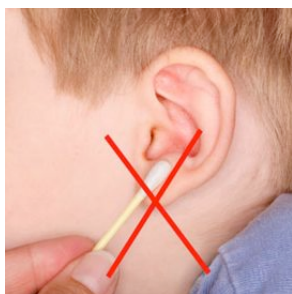
Warning! **Things that should not be tried:**



Ear Candles



This involves burning a hollow candle with one end into the ear, and it should not be tried.



You should never attempt to remove earwax yourself, or put things in your ear.

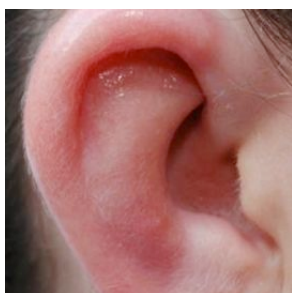


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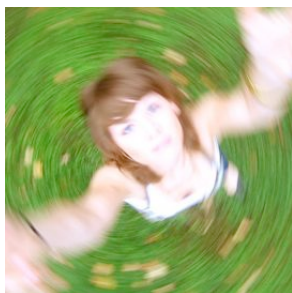
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Complications with Earwax Blockages:



- Infection or;



- Sometimes an uncomfortable feeling and vertigo (feeling that you are moving when you are still)



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Complications After Ear Irrigation:



- Swelling or pain inside the ear



- Perforation (hole in the eardrum)



- Pain



- Vertigo



- Feeling sick or being sick



- Light bleeding. (but this usually stops on its own)

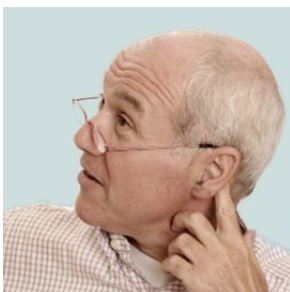


Rarely (in about 1 in every 1,000 ears that are irrigated) serious complications can occur.

These can include the following:



- **Severe infection in the ear** - in very rare cases, it can cause paralysis (when you cannot move your body) around the head or face, meningitis, and death



- The elderly, people who are diabetic, or have a weak immune system (cannot fight off illnesses easily) are most commonly affected

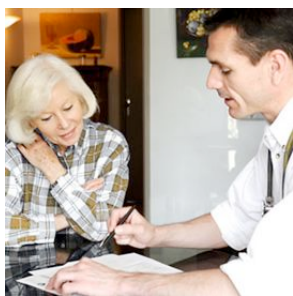


- **Tinnitus (noises in your ear)**



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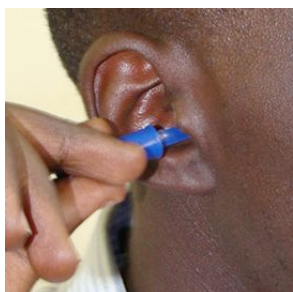
Your Doctor May Ask You to See a Specialist If:



- You may have a hole in your eardrum ('perforation')



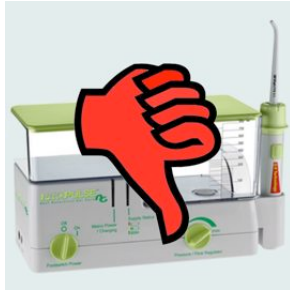
- You have had ear surgery before



- You have something in your ear



- Eardrops did not work



- Irrigation did not work



- You are in very bad pain or have vertigo. Vertigo is when you feel like you are spinning but you are actually still



- You have an infection in your ear



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The Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities paid for this leaflet to be made.

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