

Dr K C Forsyth, Dr S R Best, Dr E Alexander, Dr S M V Bennett, Dr R Imrie
Practice Manager: Elaine Grandison
Lothian Health Board Ref No: 70291

Self-Treatment of Ear Wax

Can I remove ear wax myself?

Yes, with a bulb syringe, instructions below

Is it safe?

Yes, as far as we know. In the USA and in Europe ear-wax is commonly self-treated with a bulb syringe and 2 recent research studies have concluded that self-treatment is both safe and effective.

Does it work?

Yes, in about half the people who use it. Although syringing by a nurse is a bit more effective, this treatment may be more convenient for you and it might be worth trying first.



Can I have my ears syringed by the nurse as usual if I prefer?

Of course, but you will need to put ear drops in for 7 days beforehand, so you may prefer to try self-treatment and see if it works first.

Who should NOT use this method?

People who have a hole in their ear drum (perforation) should not use this method. If your ears are painful or have fluid coming out of them you should see a doctor and don't use this method.

When is it necessary to remove ear-wax?

Ears are designed to clean themselves, and regular cleaning isn't necessary. Sometimes you may find your ear is blocked with wax and you can't hear, and if this is a problem removing the wax may help.

How do I do it?

1. Soften the wax in your ears for 2 days beforehand, using 2 drops of sodium bicarbonate solution (available from a pharmacy) at night.
2. Use a bowl of warm water of comfortable temperature, not too hot or too cold.
3. Prepare the syringe by squirting water in and out of it a few times.
4. Gently pull your outer ear "up and out" to help straighten out the canal, which will allow better access for the water.
5. Tilt your head to one side and gently squirt one or more bulb syringes of water into your ear. (This might be best done in the shower so that the excess water will run into the bathtub and not on your floor!)
6. Allow the water to remain in your ear for at least 60 seconds. Gently tilt your head in the opposite direction and wiggle your outer ear. You may note the water which comes out is now discoloured or has chunks of ear wax in it. This is a good thing.
7. Repeat if needed.
8. Repeat on your other ear if needed. Also, you may find more than one flushing per ear may be required to rid yourself of ear wax.
9. Please note we cannot supervise or be responsible for any over the counter medications or self-administered treatment. However, if you have any queries, or worries, please feel free to contact the surgery.