

Ear syringing at Croyard Medical Practice

We have made the decision to stop providing an ear syringing service at the practice.

We are faced with a huge increase in the demand for clinical time and medical services in other areas, and so we no longer have the capacity to be able to offer this service in the practice.

Ear syringing has been withdrawn by most other GP practices in Highland for some time for the same reasons.

What we can do is encourage self-care for patients; there is evidence that oiling, and also self-irrigation, can work well for a significant number of patients. We have provided the following information to encourage self-care, before accessing ear syringing.

Please note – We will never refuse appointments for those who have ear pain

Please do not attempt to self – treat if any of the following apply to you:

- Pain in the ear
- A history of ear drum perforation in the affected ear
- A recent history of an ear infection in the affected ear
- Symptoms of infection in the ear – usually pain or a smelly discharge
- If you have an offensive discharge or bleeding from the ear (this may mean you have an ear infection)
- If you only have one hearing ear which is the affected ear

Previous ear surgery on the affected ear

- Sudden deafness or buzzing
- Foreign bodies in the ear
- Dizziness

If you experience any of the above, you should seek advice from your GP or Nurse Practitioner.

Self-ear care

If there is a buildup of wax in your ear(s) please read the following self-help guide.

What is ear wax?

Ear wax is normal and is produced to form a protective coating over the skin in the ear canal. Ears are normally self-cleaning – the movement of your jaw whilst eating and talking helps to move the wax along the canal where it will usually fall out naturally without you noticing.

Why is my ear blocked with wax?

The amount of ear wax produced varies from person to person; some people produce excessive amounts which can lead to a blockage in the ear canal.

You are more likely to develop a blockage of wax in the canal if you:

- use cotton ear buds to clean the ear as this pushes the wax deeper into the canal
- wear a hearing aid, ear plugs or use in-ear speakers for i-pods or similar – as these can all interfere with the natural process of wax expulsion
- have abnormally narrow ear canals
- have a particularly hairy ear canal
- are elderly – because the ear wax you produce is drier and harder
- have a dry skin problem such as eczema or psoriasis.

Advice to help you manage and prevent ear wax blockage

Ear wax only becomes a problem if it causes deafness, discomfort or if your Health professional requires a clear view of your ear drum.

Olive Oil Drops –

The following needs to be done 2-3 times daily for 14 days.

- Lie on your side with the affected ear uppermost
- Pull the outer ear gently backwards and upwards to straighten the ear canal
- Put 2-3 drops of olive oil into the affected ear(s) and gently massage just in front of the ear
- Stay laying on your side to allow the wax to soak in for around 15 mins
- Afterwards, wipe away any excess oil but do not plug your ear with cotton wool as this simply absorbs the oil

Your hearing problem may initially worsen after first starting to use the olive oil drops; this is why we advise you to concentrate on treating one ear at a time if both ears are blocked with wax.

In most cases, after 14 days, the wax will have softened sufficiently to encourage the wax to come out without further intervention.

If your ears are regularly becoming blocked with wax, after clearing the blockage we will usually suggest you use olive oil drops as above around once per week to keep the wax soft and encourage the natural process of wax expulsion.

Should I use cotton buds in my ears?

Never use cotton buds in your ears! This pushes the wax further into the ear making it worse. It can also cause ear infections and damage the ear drum.

Self Syringing

Bulb syringes – What is a bulb syringe and where can I get one?

A bulb syringe is a small bulb shaped rubber object that will fill with water and allow the user to squirt the water gently into the ear to remove earwax. You can buy it from most pharmacies or online.

Alternatively, there are now over-the-counter kits available from pharmacies. These contain a wax softener which you use for 3-4 days and a small bulb syringe to enable you to remove the wax from your ear canals yourself.

An ear bulb syringe should be used when one or both ears are blocked with wax. This is called wax impaction. The ears are usually self-cleaning as the skin cells of the ear drum and ear canal are constantly migrating outwards and most people do not need to interfere with their ears at all. Some people make more wax, or their ears do not clean the wax as effectively as others. In these cases wax can build up inside the ear sometimes causing a blockage sensation.

A study on the use of the bulb syringe showed that half of patients who use it are successfully treated.

Studies have shown the bulb syringe to be a safe treatment. The risks of using the bulb syringe include ear infection, failure to remove the wax and eardrum perforation. These risks are low. Please follow the directions on the kit that you purchase.

What if my ears are still blocked after using the self-syringe method?

The procedure can be repeated but if it fails you may need to try ear syringing. There are many companies now offering this service in the community.

The main benefit of the bulb syringe is that you can use it yourself, it is cheap to buy and can be re-used.

Do I have to treat ear wax impaction (blocked ears from wax)?

No. If your ears being blocked with wax does not particularly trouble you, then you do not have to treat it. You can use olive oil or sodium bicarbonate drops daily and this will help the ears clean themselves. You can get these drops over the counter in any pharmacy.

Further reading:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3056857/>

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18186996>