



Canandaigua Medical Group

Earwax Blockage

Kipling Goh, M.D.

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The blockage of earwax is generally caused by an overproduction of earwax (cerumen). This causes a blockage in the external canal and emanation or loss of hearing. The amount of wax produced varies from person-to-person. This is not a sign of poor hygiene. The earwax in fact does tend to be protective for the external ear canal, which is generally warm and moist, which is a perfect area for growing germs. The earwax in fact coats the canal and protects it from these external infectious sources.

Signs and symptoms:

Include decreased hearing, ear pain, plugged feeling in the ear and sometimes ringing in the ear. Risks increase with exposure to dust, debris, family history of over production of ear wax, water in the ear which may cause the wax to swell and/or use of cotton swabs in an attempt to clean the ear canal.

Preventative measures:

Include avoiding areas where the air is dusty or filled with debris, which stimulates the overproduction of earwax. Consider wearing ear plugs if you work in this type of environment, although sometimes these cause impaction of the earwax. Occasionally, monthly use of 1-2 drops of glycerine in the ear canal may soften the wax and prevent further blockages allowing it to be flushed out with showering.

Expected outcomes:

Earwax can be removed, but stubborn cases require patience and occasionally intervention at the health care professional's office.

Possible complications:

Ear infection, eardrum damage.

General measures:

To remove earwax at home; buy a nonprescription wax softening ear drops. Lie down with the effected ear toward the ceiling. Pull the top of the ear gently up and backward toward the back of the head. Instill the ear drops using the amount given on the package directions. Leave the drops in the ear for 20 minutes or so. Continue to lie down if possible. Plug the ear with cotton. Sit up, leaning a little toward the effected side. Use the soft rubber bulb syringe to irrigate the ear canal gently with plain warm water or equal parts of warm water and hydrogen peroxide. Repeat the irrigations until the effected ear feels clean. If the ear does not clear call our office so that the wax can be removed with a probe, hook or by flushing device.

Do not try to remove the wax with a stick or cotton swab as you may damage the eardrums. May also result in trauma to the external canal and cause infections, etc. The use of nonprescription pain medication such as Tylenol or Advil is allowed.

Your doctor knows you and your family best. Nothing takes the place of talking directly with your doctor about your health and questions that you have. The information provided here is not medical care or treatment and is not specific to your situation. You need to contact your own doctor for your medical care.

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