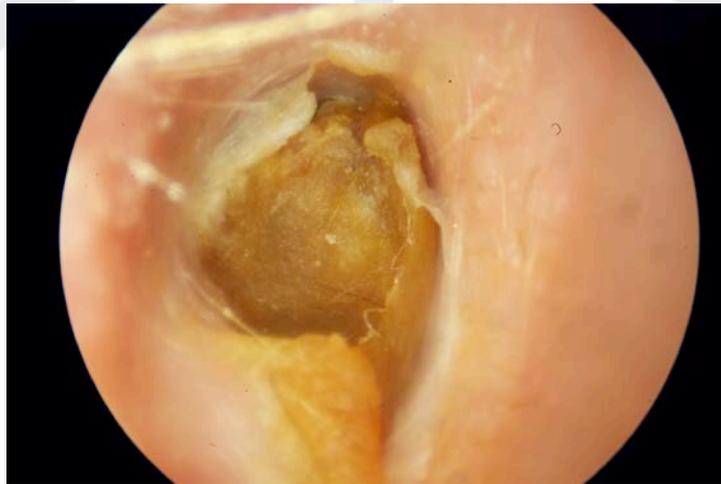


EAR WAX (CERUMEN)

Earwax is a common cause of difficulties. It may block the ear, become infected or itchy. Minor amounts may obstruct inspection of the drum. Clearing the matter ([Cleaning the Ear](#)) may result in further problems.



Ear wax: Often troublesome, often worse with cleaning.

Characteristics

Wax accumulates in the ears as a result of small secretory glands scattered throughout the canal. The wax varies in amount and consistency, and differs between racial groups. Europeans, for instance, produce variations from very little to large amounts of hard dry matter, or an almost semifluid thick sticky matter. Conversely, east Asiatic people display a fine dry granular pattern. In both instances the wax may become mixed with dead skin, shed from the canal wall.

Hairs from the superficial canal may compound the problem in a few cases.

Other cases with dead skin entangled in the wax are also more difficult to clear.

The skin of the external canal is migratory, continually moving towards the exterior, and carrying debris with it. This prevents deafness due to the ear "silting up". Excessive wax may however, occlude the canal causing deafness, thus requiring removal. Deafness ensues only when the canal is totally occluded; even a small slit around an occluding mass is sufficient to maintain hearing.

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Other Locations

Beenleigh

Sunnybank

Mt Ommaney

Caboolture

Treatment

An occluded canal is troublesome, and generally requires cleaning. Although numerous preparations are alleged to “soften” or expedite the removal of wax, these frequently compound the blockage problem; few, if any, are of benefit. There are no known methods of reducing wax production.

Self-cleaning is rarely of benefit unless the wax is known to be very soft/sloppy in which case mild self-douching may help. Particularly, intrusions with hair clips or other sharp objects are likely to be both ineffective and painful. The ear canal has a limited lumen and wax does not wipe away readily; “cotton buds/Q-tips” generally impact the wax deeper, exacerbating the problem or perforating the drum. Regrettably, hearing aids may also produce this outcome in some cases.

Cleaning the ear is a delicate matter ([Cleaning the Ear](#)), best done when some expertise is available (in the East skilled laymen may fill this role). Syringing is a common method, but is effective mainly in softer wax; harder mass may resist dislodgment. This method should only be done when the drum is known to be normally robust; perforated drums from syringing weakened drums are a common event.

Optimally, cleaning is done by expert hands using an operating microscope, and with appropriate instrumentation, including suction toilet and a range of micro-instruments developed for this task. Even so, some cases require special care to clear the wax effectively and without excessive discomfort. The patient with persistent wax accumulation requiring occasional cleaning is unfortunately a common occurrence in an ear surgery practice.

More information

- [EAC Debris](#)

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