

## Patient information factsheet

# Your child's earwax removal appointment

We have given you this factsheet because your child has been referred to the audiology department at Royal South Hants Hospital (RSH) for earwax removal. It provides information about earwax removal and explains what to expect at your child's appointment. We hope it helps to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact us using the details at the end of this factsheet.

### What is earwax?

Earwax (medically known as cerumen) is a waxy substance found in everyone's ears. It is produced by glands in the ear canal (the area between the outer ear and the eardrum).

Earwax helps to keep ears healthy and clean by:

- trapping dirt and dust so that it does not enter the ear
- protecting and moisturising the lining of the ear
- protecting against infection (earwax is slightly acidic so it naturally helps to protect the ear from infection)

Ears produce earwax all the time. To avoid a build-up of wax, the skin in the ear uses a special self-cleaning mechanism to gradually move earwax from the ear canal to the entrance of the ear, which will then fall out naturally. This movement of wax is also helped by the action of chewing and talking.

The colour, consistency and amount of earwax produced by people varies widely. Wax can be:

- dry and flaky
- crumbly
- very hard (it can become quite firmly attached to the underlying skin in your ear)
- pale and honey-coloured
- very dark brown

### What is earwax removal?

For most people, earwax will not cause any problems and it should be left alone without any attempts to remove it. However, sometimes earwax can build up and cause hearing loss or problems with hearing aids.

Earwax removal is a method which involves physically taking out wax that has built up in the ear canal. This method is used after attempts to remove the wax with drops or sprays has failed and the earwax is not naturally moving out of the ear.

# Patient information factsheet

Earwax removal is performed by an audiologist who is specially trained in removing wax. It can be performed using small tools or a procedure called microsuction, which uses a very small suction tube to 'hoover' up the build-up of wax.

## Why does my child need earwax removal?

Your child has been referred to the wax removal clinic because drops or sprays have failed to remove their earwax and it is continuing to cause them problems with their hearing or their hearing aids.

## Is earwax removal suitable for everyone?

Earwax removal is suitable for most children as long as they:

- are able to stay still throughout the procedure (without getting too distressed)
- do not currently have an ear infection

The suction tube, which is used during microsuction, makes a loud noise, similar to the noise made by a vacuum cleaner. If your child is frightened by loud sounds, or dislikes their ears being touched, wax removal may not be suitable for them.

Microsuction will **not** be suitable for your child if they have:

- grommets (tiny tubes inserted into the eardrum which allow air to pass through the eardrum)
- a hole (perforation) in their eardrum which has happened in the last 90 days

However, we may still be able to try and remove their wax build-up using a different tool. If this is the case for your child, we will arrange an appointment for them in the wax removal clinic.

## How should I prepare my child for their appointment?

Microsuction works best if the wax is soft, because if the wax is hard and dry, it can be uncomfortable. To make sure your child's earwax is soft, please use wax-softeners for two weeks before your child's wax removal appointment.

**Do not** use ear drops or ear sprays if your child has an ear infection, grommets or a perforation in their eardrum. If any of these apply to your child, please contact us for advice.

To soften the wax, you can use either:

- olive oil drops or olive oil spray (such as Earol) or
- sodium bicarbonate drops (5%).

Follow the instructions on the packaging carefully. These instructions will tell you how often to apply the drops and for how long. You can find these drops in any pharmacy, and you do not need a prescription for them. Alternatively, your child's general practitioner (GP) may be able to provide you with a prescription.

## Tips for using ear drops or sprays

- You can use either drops or a spray. If drops don't seem to be working, try a spray instead.
- If you have tried olive oil in your child's ears in the past and it hasn't worked, try sodium bicarbonate instead. If sodium bicarbonate hasn't worked in the past, try olive oil.
- The drops need to go fully into the ear canal so that they make contact with the wax. To do this, follow the steps on the next page:

1. Ask your child to lie on their side (you may find this is easiest while they are distracted, for example watching television).
  2. Place the drops into the entrance of their ear canal.
  3. Massage their outer ear.
- If your child uses hearing aids, apply the drops before bed so that they will not need to use their hearing aids for a while after applying the drops.
  - If your child dislikes having drops put in their ear, try applying them while they sleep at night.

## What will happen at the appointment?

The wax removal procedure will be performed by two audiologists. The audiologists are very used to working with children. However, if your child has any additional needs that we should know about before we see them in clinic, please let us know.

We will ask you and your child a few questions. We will then ask your child to lie or sit on a bed. We will use a microscope (a specialist device for looking in ears) to look in your child's ears. We will then remove the build-up of wax using microsuction or other tools. We will talk to your child throughout the procedure and will stop if your child is finding the wax removal too stressful.

To try to keep your child calm and relaxed throughout the procedure, we may encourage them to watch a television programme on a tablet or other smart device. If your child becomes too distressed by the noise of the suction tube, we will try to remove the wax using small tools instead.

Please note that sometimes it is not possible to remove the wax. This can happen if the wax is too hard and dry, or if your child becomes too upset to continue with the procedure. If this is the case, we will discuss this with you.

## How long will it take?

The wax removal appointment usually takes around 30 minutes.

## Are there any side effects?

Microsuction is generally a safe procedure (except for children who have grommets or a perforation in their eardrum). However, as with any medical procedure, your child may experience some temporary side effects, including:

- dizziness
- a reduction in their hearing due to the noise of the suction
- dry and irritated skin in the ear canal

These side effects usually last for between a few minutes to 24 hours (except for dry skin which may take a bit longer to improve).

Although rare, your child's ear canal may feel sore or bleed a little after having wax removal. If this happens, we may advise you to keep your child's ears dry for a few days after the wax removal to minimise the risk of infection while their ear(s) recover.

If you have any concerns about your child's ears after wax removal, contact us for advice.

# Patient information factsheet

## Aftercare advice

Children should not need regular earwax removal. However, we may recommend using drops or sprays regularly to prevent future build-up of wax. If this is the case, we will discuss this with you at your child's wax removal appointment.

To care for your child's ears, it is important that you:

- **do not** use cotton buds to clean them (this will push wax further into the ear, making it worse and can even cause hearing loss)
- **do not** try to remove the earwax by yourself, especially with any unconventional methods (such as candles, cotton buds, tools) as these are extremely dangerous and may cause permanent damage to the ear

If, in the future, you think that your child may have a build-up of wax, contact your GP for advice. If your child has hearing aids and is currently under our care, you may also contact us for advice in the event of wax build-up.

## Contact us

If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact us.

Audiology department

Telephone: **023 8120 2997**

Email: [rshaudiology@uhs.nhs.uk](mailto:rshaudiology@uhs.nhs.uk)

## Useful links

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/earwax-build-up](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/earwax-build-up)

If you are a patient at one of our hospitals and need this document translated, or in another format such as easy read, large print, Braille or audio, please telephone **0800 484 0135** or email [\*\*patientsupporthub@uhs.nhs.uk\*\*](mailto:patientsupporthub@uhs.nhs.uk)

For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit [\*\*www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport\*\*](http://www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport)

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