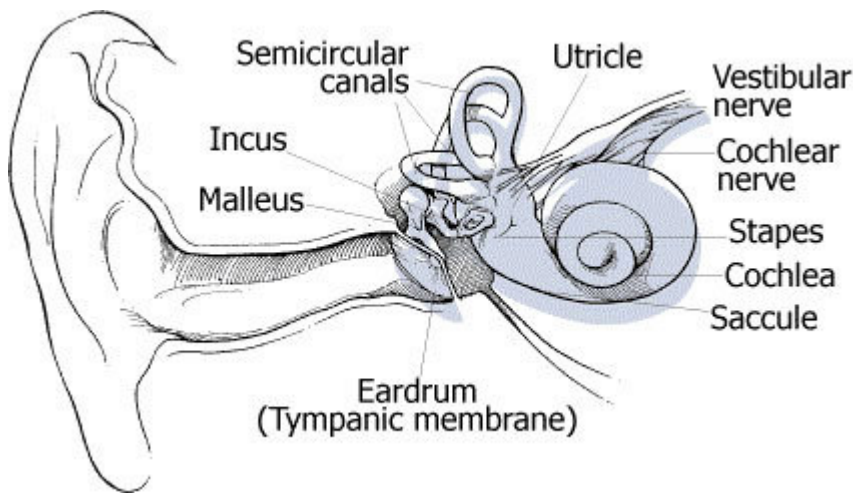


## What is earwax for?

- Glands in the skin of the outer part of the ear canal make earwax (also called cerumen).
- The wax traps dust and small particles to keep the ear clean.
- It also helps keep water out of the ears.

## How can I clean my ears?

- The ears clean themselves of wax. You should not have to clean them.
- The wax builds up a little, then dries out and falls, or is wiped, out of the ear.
- Without wax, the ears become dry and itchy. A normal amount of earwax is healthy.
- Cotton swabs (such as Q-tips) are not recommended for cleaning.
- If you feel you must use cotton swabs, use them no more than once or twice a week.
- Use them gently. Do not push them into the ear. Use on the outer part of the ear. (See picture below.)



## What is earwax impaction?

- Impaction means that several layers of earwax have been pushed together and may be stuck in the ear.

## What causes it?

- Normal wax builds up in the outer part of the ear canal, not near the eardrum.
- If a patient has build-up near the eardrum, it is usually because the wax has been pushed there.
- Patients who are trying to clean their ears with a cotton swab (Q-tip) or twisted tissue sometimes actually push the wax deeper into the ear.
- This not only can cause wax build-up, but it can injure the thin skin of the ear canal.

## Who can get it?

- Anyone can get impaction, but it tends to be more common in certain ethnic groups.
- People with narrow ear canals are more likely to get it.
- People who use cotton swabs in their ears are more likely to get it.

## What are the signs and symptoms of it?

- Ears feel plugged.
- Partial loss of hearing.

## How is it treated?

- You may try ear drops at home before calling a doctor.
- Eardrops soften the wax so it comes more easily out of the ear.
- Some drops can be found over-the-counter, such as Debrox or Murine Ear Drops. A mixture of 1 part hydrogen peroxide and 1 part water (or equal amounts) can also be used.
- You can use several drops twice a day.
- Tilt your head to one side and fill the ear canal using an eyedropper.
- Let soak in for a minute or two.
- Do this to the other ear if needed.
- Do this up to two times a day for 3 to 4 days.
- After 3 to 4 days, follow the same steps once a day.
- If impaction is a frequent problem, put 2 or 3 drops into each ear once a week.
- Stop using the drops if it causes any discomfort, dizziness, or drainage.
- If home treatment doesn't work, call the doctor.
- To clean out the wax, the doctor might wash it out, vacuum it out, or use special tools to get it out.

## How long does it last?

- If the impaction does not improve with home treatment after 7 days, call the doctor.

## When should I call the doctor?

- If you or your child have tubes in the ears, call your doctor before using drops, oil, or peroxide to clean them out.
- If impaction is a frequent problem, ask the doctor to suggest ways you can prevent it.
- Call the doctor if impaction does not improve after 7 days of home treatment.
- Call the doctor if you have questions or concerns.

## Quick Answers

- Earwax (or cerumen) traps dust and small particles to keep them clean.
- The ears clean themselves of wax. You should not have to clean them. If you feel you must use cotton swabs, use them no more than once or twice a week.
- Impaction means that several layers of earwax have been pushed together.
- If a patient has build-up near the eardrum, it is usually because the wax has been pushed there with a cotton swab or twisted tissue.
- People who use cotton swabs in their ears are more likely to get it.
- If your ears feel plugged or if your hearing is muffled, it could be a sign of impaction.
- Eardrops soften the wax so it comes more easily out of the ear.
- If the impaction does not improve with home treatment after 7 days, call the doctor.
- If impaction is a frequent problem, ask the doctor to suggest ways you can prevent it.

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