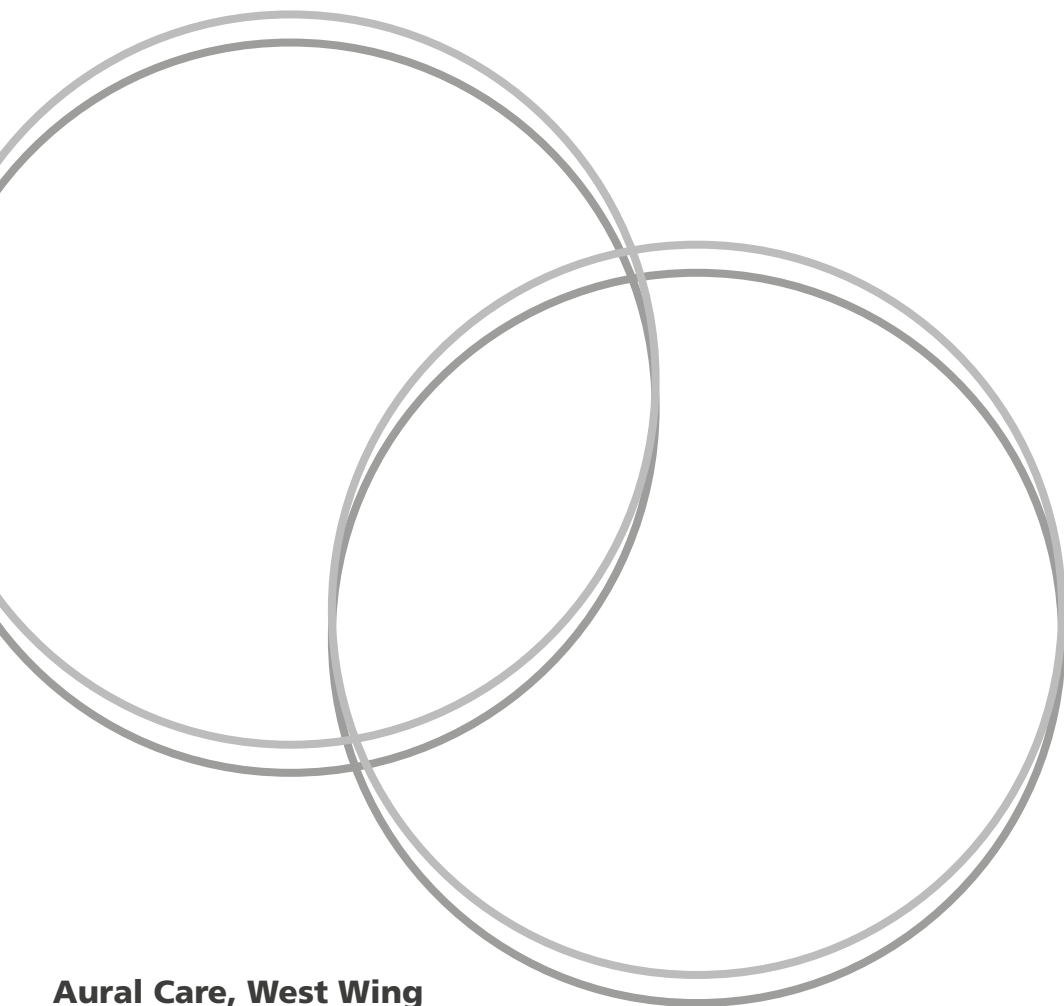




Oxford University Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

# All about your ears

Information for patients



Aural Care, West Wing

This information leaflet has been written to tell you about your ears and how to look after them. Not all of the information contained in this leaflet will be relevant to you. Your Aural Care nurse will show you which parts are important for you to read. However, you may find the other information generally useful.

## **How do I clean my ears?**

### **You don't!**

Your ears are self cleaning. The skin in your ears acts like a conveyor belt. It travels along your ear canal from your ear drum bringing any debris with it. Sometimes this 'conveyor belt' motion does not work very effectively, so you need to have your ears cleaned out by the Practice Nurse at your GP surgery or by the Aural Care service.

If you use cotton buds or anything else to clean your ears, you can disrupt the ears' natural cleaning system. Often the only thing this achieves is to push wax further down the ear canal, making you feel deaf temporarily and causing damage to your ear canal or your ear drum.

If you have had ear surgery the natural cleaning system will not work. The change in shape of your ear canal means that wax and debris can build up and so we have to clean your ear regularly for you in the Aural Care Clinic.

## How do I keep my ears dry?

We may ask you to keep your ears dry for a number of reasons. For example, if you have suffered from frequent infections, preventing water from getting in your ears can help to prevent further infections. We usually ask you to do this when you bathe, wash your hair or swim.

The best way of preventing water getting into your ears is by using cotton wool and Vaseline (petroleum jelly). We recommend that you do the following:

- Using a good quality cotton wool, break off a piece which will fit in your ear. Make sure the piece is big enough so that you can easily remove it.
- Roll it into a bullet shape, cover it in Vaseline and massage Vaseline into it.
- Put it in your ear and smear some Vaseline over the top.
- Once you have showered and washed your hair throw the cotton wool plug away.

If you prefer you can use ear plugs but you must make sure they fit properly to create a good seal and do not let the water in. If you wish you can have ear plugs made by the Audiology department which will be moulded to the shape of your ear. There is a small fee for this service.

Sometimes patients will be told to keep their ears dry but to use ear drops – this is OK. The drops are to be used to treat a problem. We ask you to prevent water getting in to your ears as this often contributes to infection.

## **What should I use for softening ear wax?**

There are a number of over-the-counter ear drops you can buy and use to soften wax. We recommend the use of olive oil. This can be the same olive oil you cook with; alternatively you can buy small bottles from your local chemist. You should use it twice a day for about 2 weeks before you have your appointment. If you wear hearing aids it is better to use sodium bicarbonate ear drops or spray as the olive oil can block your hearing aid.

If the wax is very hard or we have difficulty removing it we will ask you to use sodium bicarbonate drops; you can buy these from your local chemist. These should only be used for 7 to 10 days. Alternatively we have a sodium bicarbonate spray which we can sell to you.

## **How should I put drops in my ears?**

If possible get someone else to do it for you.

- You should warm the drops/olive oil to body temperature before putting them in. If you put cold drops in your ears you will become dizzy for a short while.
- Lay on your side with the ear to be treated uppermost.
- Put the prescribed number of drops into your ear. If you are using olive oil, just put in a few drops.
- Use your finger to push on the small area at the front of your ear (tragus) as if you were trying to block your ear from a loud noise. Do this a few times to 'pump' the drops in.
- Stay on your side for 5 minutes (use a clock to time it) to make sure the drops soak in.
- You can put a piece of cotton wool in your ear as a temporary measure to stop any drops running out again.

If you are to treat both ears then wait for a while before treating the other ear.

## **What can I do when my ears itch?**

Do not be tempted to scratch your ears or poke anything in them to stop the itching.

If your ears itch then you can buy a product over the counter called Ear Calm Spray. It is a mild vinegar solution and helps to restore the natural acidity of your ear canal. Patients often find that if they make lots of wax their ears itch. The Ear Calm Spray will help with this.

Sometimes your ears itch because you have a skin condition such as eczema or psoriasis. This will need to be diagnosed by either your GP or by your Aural Care Nurse. However, if you have had lots of infections we cannot always determine if this is the case when you first visit us. We often ask patients to use Ear Calm Spray as a first line treatment. If this doesn't work then during your next few visits we will ask you to try varying strength steroid based products to combat the itching.

## **How to contact us**

If you simply need to change your appointment please phone:

### **Patient Contact Centre**

Telephone: **01865 231 405**

Monday to Friday: 8.00am to 6.00pm.

If you need to speak to a nurse you can phone:

Telephone: **01865 231 201** or **01865 231 202**



## Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

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Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust  
[www.ouh.nhs.uk/information](http://www.ouh.nhs.uk/information)



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