

## Safely Cleaning One's Ears

If all things were as nature intended, one would not have to clean the ears. The earwax and debris would naturally work its way out. However, especially with hearing aids, that is not likely to happen. Rather, the hearing aids tend to push the wax and debris deeper into the ear canal.

“Cerumen or earwax is healthy in normal amounts and serves as a self-cleaning agent with protective, lubricating, and antibacterial properties. The absence of earwax may result in dry, itchy ears. Most of the time the ear canals are self-cleaning; that is, there is a slow and orderly migration of earwax and skin cells from the eardrum to the ear opening. Old earwax is constantly being transported, assisted by chewing and jaw motion, from the ear canal to the ear opening where it usually dries, flakes, and falls out.” [American Academy of Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery, http://www.entnet.org/content/earwax-and-care](http://www.entnet.org/content/earwax-and-care)

(It should be noted that over cleaning may cause dry, itchy ears. Itchy ears may also be a result of ear fungus or as my ENT called it, “athletes foot of the ear”.)

Some people continue to use Q-tips etc. as a means of clearing the ear. The danger is that the Q-tip can not only push the wax deeper into the ear but could also puncture the eardrum itself. Nothing smaller than the Big Toe should be placed in the ear. (Maybe that’s where the Athletes Foot of the ear came from.)

The outer ear can be cleaned with a simple cloth and water, no soap. My mother use to tell me that I could grow a crop of potatoes in the dirt around my ears—“Go wash them again.” In that case, soap may be necessary. Understand that some soap can contribute to dry itchy ears. Be careful not to reach in too deeply with the cloth. (Hearing Health Foundation)

When should the inner ear be cleaned?

Earache, fullness in the ear, or a sensation the ear is plugged

Partial hearing loss, which may be progressive

Tinnitus, ringing, or noises in the ear **Relatively new onset**

Itching, odor, or discharge **May need to see an ENT**

Coughing **May need to see a doctor**

**American Academy of Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery,**

**<http://www.entnet.org/content/earwax-and-care> (red indicates this author)**

Over the years, I have heard that some people have used an ear wax candle to help remove the wax. As an older method, it was once recommended by

some doctors. While this approach still has a following, it is very dangerous and can cause serious harm. It is not only **not** recommended but also strongly discouraged. Since 1996 the FDA has taken regulatory action against ear wax candles.

Typical cleaning may involve the use of an earbulb/ear syringe and:

- “Common mixtures include a 1:1 mixture of hydrogen peroxide and water, or a 1:1 mixture of rubbing alcohol and white vinegar (acetic acid). Flushing the ear canal every few weeks will often clean the ear and prevent wax impaction.”  
(An instrument specialist recommended Apple Cider Vinegar)
- “If this does not work to relieve the symptoms, then an over-the-counter wax removal kit may be beneficial. This device attempts to soften the ear wax and allow gentle removal “
  - See more at:  
<http://www.hmh.net/HMHWebsite/Service.aspx?PageID=168#sthash.zeoHGW8N.dpuf> ,  
Dr. Robert Wilson, ENT Surgical Specialists, Hardin Memorial Hospital

“Caution is advised to avoid having your ears irrigated if you have diabetes, a perforated eardrum, tube in the eardrum, or a weakened immune system.” [American Academy of Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery, http://www.entnet.org/content/earwax-and-care](http://www.entnet.org/content/earwax-and-care)

If the solution does not work, a visit to an ENT may be necessary.

I have heard of people and even doctors using a water pic instead of the ear syringe. This has been loosely associated with an onset of Tinnitus and is not recommended.

For the combination of fungus, itchy ears and ear wax, an ENT handout suggests 1000 ML Boric Acid in a Sterile 3% solution or ½ cup of boric acid powder in 1 gallon of distilled or sterile water.

As a volunteer writer, I strongly recommend that you read the resources below.

Compiled by Ed Schickel

<http://hearinghealthfoundation.org/blog?blogid=212>

<http://www.entnet.org/content/earwax-and-care>

<http://www.popsugar.com/fitness/Q-Tips-Should-Used-Clean-Ears-1020618>

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/07/21/dont-clean-ear-qtip\\_n\\_5600401.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/07/21/dont-clean-ear-qtip_n_5600401.html)

<http://www.hmh.net/HMHWebsite/Service.aspx?PageID=168>

<http://www.bustle.com/articles/143342-how-to-clean-your-ears-without-damaging-them-so-your-hearing-stays-intact>