Earwax awareness guide

Earwax is normal and protective. Most people never need it removed. Care staff observe, record and escalate. **Care staff do not remove earwax.**

Possible signs of wax build-up

- muffled hearing or a blocked, full feeling in the ear
- hearing aid whistling or sounding weak, even with a new battery
- wax filters or domes blocking much more often than usual
- visible wax at the entrance to the ear canal

These signs can have **other causes**. Only a professional can examine the ear and decide.

Care staff can

- [ ] Look at the outer ear in good light, without putting anything in it
- [ ] Clean the outer ear and behind the ear with a damp cloth
- [ ] Keep hearing aids, earmoulds, domes and filters clean
- [ ] Record what you see and report it to the nurse or senior
- [ ] Support ear drops only when a GP, nurse, pharmacist or audiologist has advised them, following the care plan and medicines policy

Care staff must never

- put **anything** into the ear canal: cotton buds, fingers, tissues or instruments
- try to **remove** earwax, syringe or wash out the ears, or use ear candles
- use ear drops **without professional advice**
- **diagnose**, or tell anyone “it’s just wax”

Get medical advice the same day (GP or NHS 111) for

- **sudden hearing loss** – never assume it is wax
- ear **pain**, **discharge**, bleeding, swelling or redness
- new **dizziness** with ear symptoms
- a high temperature with ear symptoms

Call 999 for hearing loss with stroke signs (face drooping, arm weakness, slurred speech, sudden confusion), or a head injury with blood or clear fluid from the ear.

Professional earwax removal

If wax needs removing, a trained professional will examine the ear first. Methods include microsuction and electronic irrigation. NICE advises against manual syringing. Ask your GP practice what is available locally.

General information only. Always follow your care home's policies, the manufacturer's instructions and the resident's care plan. In an emergency call 999. Version: November 2026.