

What are the symptoms?

- Trouble hearing
- Pain in the ear
- Hearing a ringing noise in the ear
- Feeling like the ear is blocked or plugged
- Can happen in one or both ears

What causes cerumen impaction?

Normally, ear wax (cerumen) helps to protect the insides of the ears and prevents injury or infection. But having too much ear wax can cause symptoms such as pain and trouble hearing. Ear wax (cerumen) impaction is when ear wax builds up enough to cause symptoms.

Several different things can cause ear wax impaction:

- **A narrow ear canal** - In some people, the ear canals are narrower than in others. These people might be more likely to have ear wax impaction. A person's ear canal can become narrower after an ear injury or after severe or multiple ear infections.
- **Bad ear-cleaning habits** - Some people try to clean their ears using cotton swabs (Q-Tips) or other tools. This can actually push the wax deeper into the ear instead of getting it out. Over time, this can cause ear wax impaction.
- **Making too much ear wax** - Some people make more ear wax than others. This can happen when water gets trapped in the ear, or when the ear is injured. But some people have a lot of ear wax for no obvious reason.
- **Changes in ear wax and lining due to aging** - As people get older, their ear wax gets harder and thicker. This makes it difficult for the wax to move out of the ear as it should.

How do I feel better?

The insides of the ears do not usually need to be cleaned. Sticking anything into the ears can push the wax in deeper and cause impaction.

There are several different ways to remove ear wax:

- **Ear drops** - Special ear drops (Debrox) can soften ear wax and help it to drain out. Ear drops are not usually safe for people with an ear infection or damage to the eardrum.
- **Rinsing** - In some cases, a provider or nurse can remove impacted ear wax by squirting warm water (or a special liquid) into the ear to rinse it out.
- **Special tools** - A provider or nurse might use a special tool to remove ear wax. There are different types of tools that can do this safely. These include small sticks, hooks, and spoons. There are also tools that use suction to pull the wax out.