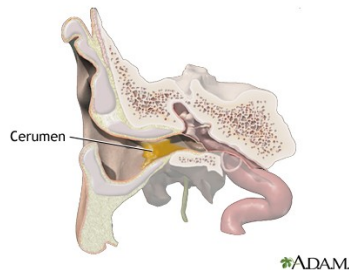




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Cerumen (ear wax)

Cerumen, commonly known as ear wax, is produced by secretory glands (sebaceous and ceruminous) located in the external one-third of the ear canal. Cerumen acts as a physical barrier to protect the skin from water, infections, trauma, and foreign bodies.



Cerumen accumulation medial to the narrowest point of the ear canal (isthmus) can cause accumulation and impaction of cerumen that can result in multiple symptoms or trapping of desquamating skin deep to the impaction.

Why does it occur?

- Prevention of the natural ear canal skin migration (obstruction due to skin conditions, bony growth causing obstruction, soft tissue lesions).
- Narrowing of the canal due to chronic external ear infections, bony overgrowth, external canal skin and bony lesions, hair in the ear canal.
- Changes in the cerumen composition due to atrophy of the glands (causing dry, hard cerumen)
- Iatrogenic impaction that can occur during attempts to remove cerumen at home with cotton applicators (Q-tips) or inappropriate instrumentation.
- Overproduction.

What symptoms?

- Cerumen impactions can result in multiple symptoms as itchy ears, ear fullness, clogged ear sensation, hearing loss, heartbeat sound in the ear, ringing sensation, hearing loss, dizziness/imbalance, ear ache.

How can it be diagnosed?

- cerumen impactions can be diagnosed by our team of skilled provider via hand-held otoscopy and microscopic examination.
- Other serious condition can cause similar symptoms. Our team will be able to rule out and treat those conditions.
- Primary care providers are often able to remove cerumen impactions. If your symptoms do not resolve after cerumen have been removed, request an appointment or referral to be evaluated in our clinic.

When to remove?

- Impacted cerumen, symptomatic patients, patient unable to express symptoms (young children or cognitive impaired children and adults)
- Your provider might recommend use of cerumenolytic topical agents (cerumen ear drops) to help you manage cerumen impactions.
- We invite you to review the Dos and Don'ts of ear wax published by the American Academy of Otolaryngology and Head and Neck surgery: <https://aao-hnsfjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1177/0194599816680327>

What to avoid?

- Avoid ear candling/coning. Ear candling is proposed as a natural treatment for cerumen impaction. It is usually ineffective, but most importantly, can cause injury as burns and damage to the ear canal, tympanic membrane, and hearing apparatus.
- Avoid use of objects as cotton applicators/swabs (Q-tips) or any other object that could cause injury or displace cerumen deep in the ear canal. Small objects can cause direct trauma to the canal, tympanic membrane, ossicles, and inner ear causing permanent damage to your ear.

Please contact our office for any questions or request an appointment to be seen by our providers.