

Microsuction

This leaflet will answer some of the questions you may have about the ear, and the procedure called microsuction. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the doctor, nurse or audiologist caring for you.

What is microsuction?

Microsuction is one of the safest methods to clean the ear. The nurse, doctor or audiologist treating you looks at your ear using a microscope. This magnifies the ear, making it easier to assess and treat. A suction device is used to clean the ear without the use of water. The gentle suction device works in a similar way to a vacuum cleaner and although it can be quite noisy, it is quick and painless. If the object being removed is hard, then removal can be slightly uncomfortable. The person performing the procedure will always advise you if they feel it is going to be uncomfortable.

When microsuction is being used to remove wax, then the procedure tends to be less uncomfortable if a wax softening spray (for example, Earol[®] olive oil spray which can be purchased over the counter) is used for two nights before, and on the morning of, the appointment.

Who needs microsuction?

Most people can have their ears successfully treated in their GP practice. Wax, debris, foreign body or excess skin can be removed by irrigating (spraying with water) the ear. Microsuction is carried out on people who should not have water in their ears, especially if they have:

- experienced any serious complications from a previous irrigation with water.
- had a middle ear infection (otitis media) in the last two months.
- had any form of ear surgery, apart from grommets which have not been in the ear for more than two years and the patient is no longer attending ENT (ears, nose and throat) appointments. (This does not include people who have cosmetic surgery to reduce the size of their ears.)
- a hole in their ear drum (a perforation) or there is a history of a mucous (thick) discharge from their ear in the last two years.
- a cleft palate (repaired or not).
- a painful ear infection (acute otitis externa).

How can I look after my ears?

- Do not use cotton buds, scratch or poke your ears. The ear canal naturally cleans itself and when you fiddle with the ears you are more likely to cause them problems such as a build-up of wax or an ear infection.
- To clean the outside of the ear use a dry tissue or alcohol-free baby wipes around and behind the ear after showering or bathing.
- Make sure you never use cotton buds, tissues or material to soak up any moisture in your ears. Let them dry naturally.

- If your ears feel itchy or you have suffered from an ear infection avoid getting water, soap or shampoo into the ear canal when having a bath or shower. Place a piece of cotton wool about the size of a 50p coin, coated with white soft paraffin (which you can buy at a pharmacy), at the entrance of both ear canals. Do not push the cotton wool down into the ear canal as it may be difficult to remove.
- To keep your ears dry when swimming, you may consider wearing a tight-fitting swimming hat over your ears. Headbands are also available to protect the ears from water. This will also help to keep cotton wool or earplugs in place.
- If you suffer from frequent ear infections it may be helpful to visit an audiologist (a specialist ear and hearing problems) and have an impression taken of your outer ear for swimming plugs. The plugs create a seal against water entry. This service may be provided for you by the NHS. Ask your GP or practice nurse to refer you.
- If you wear a hearing aid, wash the **mould** daily in warm soapy water while you are having treatment. Discuss with your hearing aid provider the benefit of the mould being vented (having a hole in the mould to allow air into the ear canal when wearing the aid) or having a hypo-allergenic mould, which contains material less likely to cause a reaction with the skin.
- If you suffer from itchy or dry skin in your ear canals speak to your local pharmacist or a healthcare professional about treatments available.
- **Do not to use over-the-counter products if there is a chance that your eardrum may be perforated (have a hole in it).**

Contact us

If you are concerned about your ears, see your local nurse or doctor. There is a nurse-led ear care clinic held at St Thomas' Hospital. Ask your GP or practice nurse to refer you.

Nurse-led ear care clinic

ENT Department, 2nd Floor, Lambeth Wing, St Thomas' Hospital, London SE1 7EH.

Paediatric Access Team, **t:** 020 7188 4690, **e:** PaediatricAppointmentsENT@gstt.nhs.uk

Adult Access Team, **t:** 020 7188 8872, press option 2, **e:** gst-tr.entaccessteam@nhs.net

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline. **t:** 020 7188 8748, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch. **t:** 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk



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