Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Wax Removal (Irrigation and Microsuction)

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Patient Information

Community Children's Audiology

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Introduction

Your child has been referred for wax removal from either one or both of their ears. This may be because they have a hearing loss which is suspected to be caused by the wax, or we need the ears to be clear for their hearing aid use and/or future appointment with us.

Ear wax is a normal body secretion that provides protection against infection, dust particles and foreign objects. The ear is self-cleaning, and wax will usually work its way out naturally.

Irrigation

Irrigation is a procedure that is completed by our Consultant Audiovestibular Physician. This involves the removal of wax from your outer ear by the use of water.

This is performed by using body temperature water that is inserted into the ear canal. Your child will wear an apron to minimise the risk of getting them wet. Another clinician will hold a paper cup under your child's ear to catch the water.

Before Irrigation

Before your child's appointment, we recommend that you use some Olive Oil ear drops to soften the ear wax. Most patients find that applying 2-3 drops of Olive Oil ear drops at nighttime for one week prior to a wax removal appointment is beneficial. This is because the Olive Oil will soften the ear wax, making it easier for the wax to be removed.

Some parents/guardians may find it easier to use a dropper or an Olive Oil spray such as ‘Earol’. You can purchase both types of eardrops at your local pharmacy. Do not use cotton wool following insertion, as it will soak up the Olive Oil. Please only use cotton wool to gently wipe away any excess Olive Oil from around your child’s outer ear.

Risks

Ear irrigation is safe, and complications are rare, but as with all medical procedures, it is not without risk. The potential risks include:

- Failure to remove the ear wax; sometimes some wax may be left over
- Pain/discomfort
- Dizziness/vertigo
- Nausea/vomiting
- Perforation of the ear drum (a hole in the ear drum)
- Ear infection
- Worsening of pre-existing tinnitus (ringing in the ears)
- Grazing of the ear canal, which may result in some slight bleeding

During Irrigation

It can sometimes be uncomfortable for young children to have their ears irrigated (cleaned via water), but it should not be painful for them.

Before the procedure, please make sure that your child understands that they should let us know immediately if any of the following occur during the procedure:

- Any ear pain or dizziness.
- If the water is too hot or too cold for them.
- If they want the doctor to stop.

Following Irrigation

Once your appointment has ended, please ensure that you keep your child's ears dry for a few days, especially when bathing and swimming.

If your child's ears start to discharge or become painful, you should ring your child's GP to make an appointment. Alternatively, you may contact us.

If your child has continued problems with excessive ear wax, it may be beneficial to use 2-3 drops of Olive Oil each month. This will not prevent wax forming, but it will make wax removal easier as the ear wax will be softer.

Microsuction

Microsuction is a procedure that is completed by our Consultant Audiovestibular Physician. This involves the removal of wax, debris and/or foreign objects from your outer ear.

This is performed by using a microscope and a suction tube (a tiny hoover), which will allow for the removal of wax and debris from the ear canal.

Why does my child need Microsuction?

Microsuction is used as an alternative to irrigation. There are many reasons why some children may need to have microsuction as an alternative. These include:

- Previous issues when having irrigation
- A perforated eardrum
- A history of perforations.
- Recent ear infection
- Any recent surgery on the ears
- Eczema within the ear canal

Before Microsuction

Before your child's microsuction appointment, we recommend that you use Olive Oil ear drops to the affected ear/s twice a day for 5-7 days before your appointment with us. This will allow the wax to become soft, which in turn, makes it much easier to remove.

Risks

Microsuction is safe and complications are rare, but as with all medical procedures, it is not without risk. The potential risks include:

- Failure to remove the ear wax; sometimes some wax may be left over.
- Pain/discomfort, especially if the wax is hard
- Grazing of the ear canal, which may result in some slight bleeding. This is more likely to happen if the patient is moving.
- Perforation of the ear drum (a hole in the ear drum)
- Dizziness/vertigo
- Temporary tinnitus
- Ear infection

During Microsuction

Your child needs to lie still whilst microsuction is taking place. If they find this difficult to do, the procedure can be paused to allow for a break.

Microsuction is quite a noisy procedure due to the hoover. Some children may find this noise uncomfortable; however, it is not loud enough to cause any permanent damage to your child's hearing. If the loud noise is too much for your child, the procedure can be paused to allow for a break.

Some children report some discomfort if the ear wax is hard or if there is a lot of it inside the ear canal. However, if the procedure becomes too painful at any stage, it will be stopped and re-assessed.

Following Microsuction

There are no special precautions that need to be followed after microsuction.

If your child has continued problems with excessive ear wax, it may be beneficial to use 2-3 drops of Olive Oil each month. This will not prevent wax forming, but it will make wax removal easier, as the ear wax will be softer.



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