

THE FARNHAM DENE MEDICAL PRACTICE

EAR CARE.

Your ears are delicate structures, and our hearing such a valuable sense that it is worth taking good care of them. The normal ear produces wax to protect the lining of the ear canal, which leads from the outer ear to the drum. Ear wax is anti-fungal, anti-bacterial and keeps our ears healthy. The ear canal is structured in such a way that wax will normally evaporate at body temperature or find its way to the outer ear where it can be easily removed with a tissue of face flannel. Cotton buds or any other sharp implement must **never** be inserted into the ear, as these may damage the delicate lining of the canal and, if, there is an accumulation of wax will merely push it further in towards the drum, or even perforate the ear drum.

If you are suffering from some hearing loss, itchiness in the ear, tinnitus, dizziness or a feeling of the ear being blocked, an examination by the nurse or doctor is advisable to determine the cause. A sense of hearing loss may be due to an accumulation of wax or it may be due to the gradual deterioration in hearing from which many of us suffer with advancing years; in this case a referral for hearing tests by an audiologist might be advisable. Itchiness in the ear is often due to a mild infection of the skin lining the ear canal, and although ear irrigation may be helpful in relieving the irritation and removing skin debris, treatment with appropriate eardrops may be necessary. A feeling of the ear being blocked can sometimes be due to an accumulation of secretions in the middle ear following a heavy cold.

If you have been advised the **ear irrigation** is necessary it is helpful to prepare for this by instilling two drops of **olive oil** into the ear canal twice daily for at least three days prior to your appointment. This will make irrigation easier, quicker and safer. Small dropper bottles are available from a pharmacy. It is often easier if someone else can put the oil into your ear. Lying down with the affected ear towards the ceiling, pull the top of the ear gently but firmly upwards and outwards to straighten the ear canal. The head should be kept to one side for 5 minutes to allow the oil to penetrate. If both ears require irrigation, repeat this procedure for the other ear. Wipe excess oil from the outer ear, but **do not** insert cotton wool, as this will absorb the oil from the canal.

There is always some **element of risk** with ear irrigation, and it is vital that you inform the nurse or doctor if you have ever had a ruptured ear drum, grommets, any surgery to your ears, mastoid disease, cleft palate, other ear problems or injuries **before** irrigation takes place.

Following ear irrigation the ear canal will be more susceptible to infection and irritants. It is advisable to avoid shampoo, shower gel, soap, and chlorinated water from entering the ear canal for a week, either by using earplugs, or cotton wool coated with petroleum jelly. There is evidence that ear irrigation stimulates the ear to increase the production of wax in order to protect itself. For this reason we try to avoid the procedure if possible. If you are prone to accumulating wax in your ears it is advisable to instill one drop of **olive oil** into each ear on a weekly basis to assist the ear in eliminating wax naturally. It is also sensible to avoid very dusty or smokey places, as it seems that these pollutants can combine with wax to cause a blockage.