Ear wax is a normal body secretion; it provides protection against infection and dust particles. The ear is self-cleaning, and the wax works its way out naturally.

Never use cotton wool buds to clean inside your ears, as they irritate the delicate skin inside the ear canal, they will also push the wax back into the ear and compact it.

Ear syringing is not risk free; therefore it is only carried out if the ear is completely blocked with ear wax. Partial blockage of the ear canal only requires syringing if you wear a hearing aid. Risks associated with ear syringing range from chronic tinnitus (ringing in the ears), to perforation of the ear drum and deafness.

If you ever had surgery to your ears or have had a perforated ear drum, you must tell us before syringing.

**PREPARING YOUR EARS FOR SYRINGING:**

To minimise risk of injury, the wax should be softened with softening ear drops for at least 5-8 days, but ideally 10 days before syringing. Olive oil is the best softening agent to use and is well tolerated in most people. To put in drops, lie on one side with the affected ear uppermost. Drop four or five drops of body warmed olive oil into the ear and leave in place for 10 minutes. You should remain lying on your side during this time, do not use cotton wool to “plug” the ear. The drops should be used twice a day for a minimum of 5-8 days, but ideally 10 days. Very rarely, the drops may cause discomfort, burning, itching. If this happens, stop using drops and seek advice from your doctor.

It can be uncomfortable to have your ears syringed but it should not be painful. If you experience any pain or dizziness during the procedure, tell the nurse immediately. It is important that the water is at a comfortable temperature, you must say if it is too hot or too cold. After you have had your ears syringed, keep them dry for a few days, as the protective wax layer has been removed.

If you have continuing problems with ear wax, it may help putting in a few drops of olive oil once a week, to keep the wax soft and aid the natural movement of skin cells and wax.

Narrow ear canals, hairy ears, ear wax getting dryer with age may predispose to build up of wax. Being in a smoky or dusty atmosphere a lot can also contribute. Earplugs, which may be mandatory in some occupations, can have a similar effect as cotton buds, causing irritation and impaction of wax. Hearing aids can interfere with the natural cleaning mechanism of the ear, causing debris to build up in the canal.