

Limited evidence for benefit of ear drops for removal of wax

Clinical Question	How effective are ear drops or sprays for removing or aiding the removal of ear wax in adults and children?
Bottom Line	A single study suggested that applying ear drops for five days may result in a greater likelihood of complete wax clearance when compared with no treatment at all (NNTB=8). However, it was not possible to draw conclusions on whether one type of active treatment was more effective than another and there was no evidence of a difference in efficacy between oil-based and water-based active treatments. There was no evidence to show that using saline or water alone was better or worse than commercially produced cerumenolytics. Equally, there was also no evidence to show that using saline or water alone was better than no treatment. Adverse effects were not common. The products included either oil-based drops (triethanolamine polypeptide, almond oil, benzocaine, chlorobutanol), water-based drops (docusate sodium, carbamide peroxide, phenazone, choline salicylate, urea peroxide, potassium carbonate), saline (salty water) or water alone.
Caveat	For both wax clearance and adverse effects, the quality of the evidence was rated as low. Nine of the studies were more than 15 years old.
Context	Ear wax is a normal bodily secretion that can become a problem when it obstructs the ear canal. Symptoms attributed to wax (such as deafness and pain) are among the commonest reasons for patients to present to primary care with ear trouble.
Cochrane Systematic Review	Aaron K et al. Ear drops for the removal of ear wax. Cochrane Reviews, 2018, Issue 7. Art. No.: CD012171.DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD012171.pub2. This review contains 10 studies involving 623 participants (900 ears).

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Systematic review link:

<https://www.cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD012171.pub2/full>