

Professional Cerumen Removal

Cerumen is a naturally occurring substance of the external auditory canal. It is usually asymptomatic, but when it becomes impacted it can cause complications such as hearing loss, aural fullness, pain, dizziness, chronic cough, and otitis externa^{1,2,4}. Cerumen can also clog the microphones or receivers of a hearing aid, which can affect performance, sound quality, and patient acceptance.

Facts & Stats

- Cerumen impaction is present in approximately 10% of children, 5% of normal healthy adults, and as high as 65% in patients aged 65 years and older^{1,4}
- It is the primary cause of adult conductive hearing loss⁵, with severe impaction causing a reduction up to 30-40 decibels⁶
- The most common cause of impaction is overproduction coupled with attempts at unsuccessful removal
- Cerumen on the tympanic membrane can cause the tensor tympani muscle to go into spasm, causing a "roaring" or "buzzing" tinnitus⁶
- The use of hearing aids, earphones, and earplugs may cause stimulation of cerumen glands, leading to excessive cerumen production. Patients who use these devices are at high risk of impaction⁷
- Ear candling is not recommended and the U.S. Food & Drug Administration advises against it. There are no controlled studies or scientific evidence that support the safety and effectiveness of this method⁸

What You Can Do To Help

Please advise against the use of Q-tips or cotton swabs to clean the ear canal, especially in children's ears. Q-tips may push the blockage further down the canal or accidentally rupture the tympanic membrane inducing hearing loss and infection. If a patient wears hearing aids it is important they have cerumen removed frequently and completely. Even a small amount of cerumen can affect the fit and performance of the device. Furthermore, wax softeners should be avoided as they can damage the hearing aid.

Cerumen management requires specialized skills, and should only be performed by trained professionals that are well versed in cerumen extraction procedures. If your patient presents with cerumen occlusion or complete impaction it can be removed safely and comfortably at our clinic. An oil based lubricant will be used to soften impacted cerumen prior to removal. It is then extracted mechanically with sterilized tools such as loop curettes and alligator forceps. Suction and syringe are used as needed. Although cerumen removal is relatively straightforward, it is a procedure that requires extra training, experience, skill, and care.

References

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