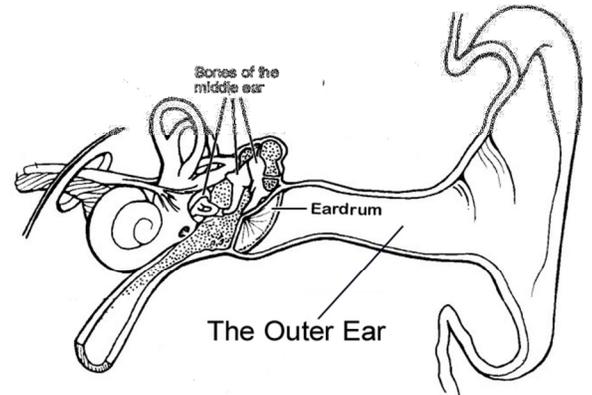


Ear Wax

Ear wax, or cerumen (SUH ru mun), is a sticky, waxy substance made in the outer ear canal. This is the area from the ear drum to the outer part of the ear (Picture 1).

How Ear Wax is Made

The skin in the outer part of the ear has special glands that produce the ear wax. Once the wax is made, it slowly goes through the outer ear canal to the opening of the ear. Most people make ear wax a little at the time, all the time. The ear canal should always have some wax in it.



Picture 1 Ear wax is made in the outer ear canal.

What It Does

- Ear wax protects and moisturizes the skin of the ear canal. This will help to prevent dry, itchy ears.
- Ear wax contains special chemicals that help to fight infection in the ear canal.
- It shields the eardrum from the outside world by trapping dirt, dust and other things that can enter the ear. If these small particles get down into the canal, they can cause injury to the eardrum.

Managing Ear Wax

Most children do not need to do anything special to remove ear wax. If your child bathes and washes his hair regularly this is usually enough to keep his ears clean. If you need to, you can wipe the outside of your child's ear with a wet washcloth.

Never put a cotton swab, your finger, or anything else in your child's ear to try to remove wax. This could cause injury or bleeding and may push the wax farther down into the canal.

Removing Ear Wax

Some children make extra ear wax. If this wax interferes with hearing, causes pain or an uncomfortable, blocked feeling in the ear, then you should talk to your doctor. Healthcare providers can often prescribe medicines that are placed in the ear to get rid of extra wax.

Sometimes your doctor will need to remove the extra wax.

When to Call the Doctor

Call your child's doctor:

- If ear pain and discomfort continue.
- If your child says that he cannot hear.
- Before using any over-the-counter treatments for ear wax removal.