



**Timothy Thomason, M.D.**  
**Otolaryngology—Head & Neck Surgery**  
**Metroplex ENT & Allergy**

## **Cerumen Impactions**

Cerumen (earwax) is made by specialized glands in the ear canal skin. It has a protective function and its presence on the surface of the ear canal skin is normal. However, sometimes the wax can completely block off the ear canal and this can become uncomfortable and cause decreased hearing. When this happens we call it an impaction.

Some people have relatively narrow ear canals and this can predispose them to recurrent problems with cerumen impactions. Also, as we age the cerumen tends to become more dry and hard. This is why elderly people tend to have more problems with cerumen impactions.

### **How to prevent cerumen impactions:**

The cerumen will usually come out of the ear canal naturally if left alone. Therefore, it is best to avoid using Q-tips except in the outermost part of the ear where it widens. Putting Q-tips or any other foreign object in the ear canal will tend to cause the cerumen to get pushed in further toward the eardrum. Foreign objects can also cause damage. If they are pushed too far in then the eardrum may get perforated. Sometimes the foreign material (such as cotton) can get stuck in the inner part of the ear canal. This can cause infection and significant pain. Therefore, it is best to avoid putting any objects (including Q-tips) in your ear canals.

If you are not putting foreign objects in your ear canal and you are still having problems with cerumen impactions then you may need to use eardrops to help soften the cerumen. Debrox Earwax removal kit is an over-the-counter kit for dissolving and flushing out earwax. Mineral or baby oil drops can also be used to soften the wax and relieve minor itching. Place 5 drops in the affected ear and let it soak for 5-10 minutes. Do this twice a day for 7 days. If this is not effective then you should make an appointment with your ENT doctor to have your earwax removed.

If you have significant itching or pain then you should see your ear, nose, and throat doctor to be sure you do not have an external ear infection. Also, if you have a perforated eardrum then ask your doctor before using any type of ear drop.