



TAKING CARE OF YOUR EARS

The external ear canal is lined by the same skin that is on the rest of your body. It makes a substance called “cerumen” or “ear wax”. This substance is usually soft and yellow in color. Just as tears in the eye keep the eye clean and moist, ear wax keeps the ear canal healthy. Ear wax contains substances that repel water and kill bacteria in the ear canal. Most people’s ear canals make just enough ear wax to do this job correctly.

Ear canal wax is constantly being produced in the ear canal and migrates out the ear canal. The ear canal, if left undisturbed, will clean itself. Q-tips, bobby pins, and other instruments are not needed to clean the ears. In fact, most of these objects actually push the ear wax deeper in the canal and interfere with the natural migration of the cerumen.

The best way to clean the ears is by using a wash cloth or Kleenex after bathing to wipe the wax away from the opening of the ear canal. Flushing the ear canal with water, alcohol, peroxide, or over the counter wax removers can cause external ear infections. Three to four drops of mineral oil once a month can help relieve ear itching and keep ear wax soft. If wax does accumulate and block the ear canal, it is best removed by an ear doctor using magnification or a microscope. Digging in the ear with a finger or other object can injure the ear canal skin and cause an infection. Most people can bathe or shower without getting water in the ears. If water does enter the ear canal, it can disturb the ear wax and cause an infection. If you have problems keeping water out of the ears, then you can use a cotton ball covered with Vaseline ointment when you bathe. If water persists in the ear canal after swimming or bathing, then it can be removed by tilting the head or even using a hair blow dryer on a low heat setting.