

EAR WAX REMOVAL (ADULTS ONLY– 16 YEARS & OVER)

CRITERIA BASED ACCESS

Micro-suction is available for the following indications only:

- Patients with acute otitis externa up to a maximum of three appointments per year (To be monitored via the audit process).
- Patients who require Micro-suction prior to the assessment, fitting or review of a hearing aid.
- The tympanic membrane is obscured by wax but needs to be viewed to establish a diagnosis.
- There is a foreign body, including vegetable matter, in the ear canal that could swell during irrigation.

PRIOR APPROVAL REQUIRED

Policy Statement

The vast majority of patients presenting with problems to primary care will be managed in primary care with advice or irrigation in line with the guidelines available.

A referral for ear wax removal in secondary care is only commissioned for patients meeting the criteria set out below.

Criteria for referral for prior approval:

- The patient is suffering from significant symptoms due ear wax build up including hearing loss or pain and the patient's condition warrants micro-suction:

AND one or more of the following:

- Has previously undergone ear surgery (other than grommets insertion that have been extruded for at least 18 months)
- Has a recent history of Otitis and /or middle ear infection (in past 6 weeks);
- Has a retraction pocket or a cholesteatoma
- Has a current perforation or history of ear discharge in the past 12 months;
- Has had previous complications following ear irrigation including perforation of the ear drum, severe pain, deafness, or vertigo;
- Ear drops have been unsuccessful and irrigation has been unsuccessful or is unavailable.

If all of the above criteria are met, prior approval will be granted for on-going treatment on the understanding that a maximum of three appointments per year will be offered at no less than six monthly intervals. If additional appointments are required within this timeframe, prior approval must be obtained before treatment is provided.

To be monitored via the audit process.

Removal of Ear Wax Pathway including Referral for Micro-suction

Appendix 1:

When should earwax be removed?

If earwax is totally occluding the ear canal and any of the following are present:-

- Hearing loss, Ear ache
- Cough suspected to be due to earwax
- Vertigo
- Tympanic membrane obscured but needs to be viewed to establish diagnosis
- If person wears a hearing aid and an impression is required for a mould

1st line: Advise patients to use olive oil (over the counter) for two weeks to soften wax and aid removal.
2nd line: Advise patient to use sodium bicarbonate drops (over the counter) for 3-5days providing they do not have a perforated tympanic membrane. (Warn the patient of potential skin irritation.)

Consider the use of an ear bulb as a safe, alternate way for patients to self-manage the removal of ear wax. Bulb syringes can be purchased from a pharmacy.

If symptoms persist, consider ear irrigation in GP surgery providing there are no contraindications and the service is available.

If irrigation unsuccessful or unavailable, other options are:-

- Advise use of olive oil for a further 5-7 days then return for further irrigation.
- Instil water into the ear. After 15 minutes, irrigate again.

Contraindications to Ear Irrigation

- History of previous problems with irrigation.
- Current perforation of the tympanic membrane.
- Grommets in place.
- A history of any ear surgery.
- A mucus discharge from the ear within the past 12 months.
- A history of a middle ear infection in the previous 6 weeks.
- Cleft palate, whether repaired or not.
- Acute otitis externa with an oedematous ear canal and painful pinna.
- Presence of a foreign body, including vegetable matter, in the ear.
- Retraction pocket or a cholesteatoma

If drops and irrigation fail, refer for micro-suction.

Prior Approval is required in line with policy criteria.

When to Refer

- There is a foreign body, including vegetable matter, in the ear canal that could swell during irrigation.

OR

- The patient is suffering from significant symptoms due to ear wax build up including hearing loss or pain and the patient's condition warrants micro-suction:

AND one or more of the following

- Has previously undergone ear surgery (other than grommets insertion that has been extruded for at least 18 months).
- Has a recent history of otalgia and /or middle ear infection (in past 6 weeks).
- Has a current perforation or history of ear discharge in the past 12 months.
- Has had previous complications following ear irrigation including perforation of the ear drum, severe pain, deafness, or vertigo.
- Ear drops have been unsuccessful and irrigation has been unsuccessful or is unavailable.