

EAR CANAL AND MASTOID CAVITY CARE

Ear canals and mastoid cavities (ear canals that have been surgically widened to treat chronic ear infections) produce wax and skin. The wax normally carries debris and bacteria out of the ear canal. This process is nature's way of keeping the lining of the ear canal healthy. Unfortunately, some ear canals and mastoid cavities do not readily clear this wax and skin. These ears tend to have problems with recurrent drainage (infection). If not attended to, these infections can cause serious problems.

Problems can be avoided by having the ear canal or mastoid cavity cleaned periodically by an ear surgeon. Routine mastoid cavity care involves removing wax and skin debris, examining the mastoid and middle ear for signs of recurrent infection or cholesteatoma (skin cysts), and possibly, application of medicines. How often this needs to be done depends on the size of the cavity and how much wax and skin an individual makes. Most people need to have their mastoid cavities cleaned 2 - 4 times each year.

Even with proper cleaning, ear canals and mastoid cavities may occasionally drain. This often happens after moisture accumulates in the mastoid, for instance after swimming or bathing. This can be helped by cleansing the ear canal with a mixture of vinegar and water, and then drying the ear canal thoroughly.

- Mix distilled white vinegar with an equal volume of fresh tap or distilled water. This mixture should be close to body temperature, because hot or cold fluids placed in the ear can make you very dizzy.
- Over a sink or in the shower, gently rinse 2 to 4 ounces of this mixture through the ear canal or mastoid cavity with a rubber bulb syringe.
- Gently press on the front, cartilage portion of the ear canal to rinse the entire canal or mastoid.
- Allow the ear to drain, then dry the ear canal completely with a hair dryer used in the cool or room temperature mode.
- You may place a few drops of mineral oil in the ear canal once or twice a week to soften the skin and wax. This may make cleanings more effective.

Every individual's ears are unique. **Please discuss your individual treatment with your ear surgeon.**