

FRANCIS SLABBER, JANET STEER & ASSOCIATES

PROFESSIONAL CARE FOR ALL YOUR HEARING PROBLEMS

THE HEARING CLINIC

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Newsletter Autumn 2007

NEWS FLASH – NEWS FLASH – NEWS FLASH

We are moving our Tokai premises a little deeper into the Tokai Village block, where we will have more space and less noise. You can find us there from 1 March 2007.

To reach us, you will still drive into the same block, but now pass the old shop, park in our reserved parking bays, or the disabled bay, and walk past Sanlam on the left into Block B. We are straight ahead and to the left. You can't miss us. Come and see our new rooms. Tel: 021 – 715 5623

A Waxy Affair

The good news about earwax is that it's a naturally occurring substance produced by healthy ears and performs a number of useful functions. It traps debris, repels water, enhances resistance to infection, deters itchiness, and prevents insects and foreign objects from entering the ear canal. It's a sticky mixture of oil and perspiration produced by \pm 2000 glands in the ear canal. It becomes entwined with skin flakes and hair while making its way out of the ear, helped on by jaw movement. In a perfect world the ears are self-cleaning; nature provides a slow and orderly migration process that transports old wax from the deeper ear canal to the outer ear opening, where most of it dries, flakes, and falls out.

Wax is most likely to become impacted when it is pushed into the ear-canal by cotton-buds, hairpins, paperclips and other objects that people put in their ears. The most recognizable symptom is partial loss of hearing but other symptoms include itching, coughing, ringing, fullness and sometimes pain. Wax should only be removed by trained professionals and is *not* a DIY job. Don't be fooled by Ear Candles either. Before prodding a hole in your eardrum or dripping hot wax on your face, or even setting alight the curtains, have your wax removed by a professional. It's cheaper in the long run.

The bad news is that for people who wear hearing aids, earwax is the most common cause of instrument malfunction. Sadly, even the most expensive and sophisticated hearing aid can be defeated by such a mundane factor as wax in the ear canal. The problem occurs when the earmould/ hearing aid prevents wax from moving out of the ear canal, causing the wax to clog the small opening of the mould or receiver port and block off the amplified sound from the ear. The hearing aid will sound weak, dead, distorted, and might start whistling. Because the electronic components in hearing aids are so tiny, even a small amount of wax can cause a malfunction. Canal aids are more vulnerable to damage from earwax and therefore have a shorter lifespan. Behind-the-ear hearing aids are less likely to be damaged by wax. However, the earmould that sits inside the ear is still at the mercy of wax and just a little bit in the wrong place can spoil the sound quality of even an expensive hearing aid.

The DIY Guide to Aural Hygiene

The issue of earwax and hearing aids is a problem without any perfect solution. Wax is a by-product of normal ear function, and the insertion of hearing aids often interferes with the ear's natural self-cleaning mechanism. However, there are steps that hearing aid wearers can take to ease the frustrations they experience from wax build-up:

- ⑨ Eardrops used at night to soften wax are inexpensive and can be bought across the counter.
- ⑨ Home remedies include regular drops of baby oil, sweet oil or olive oil. Do not try any drops if you have a history of ear infections without consulting your doctor or audiologist first.
- ⑨ Use a damp face cloth to wipe the outer part of the ear. Do not go into the ear canal.
- ⑨ Clean your hearing aids every time you take them out. Most in-the-ear hearing aids have some sort of wax filtration system that can be cleaned or replaced. It's counter-productive saving money on wax guards, but end up paying for expensive repairs caused by wax.
- ⑨ Keep the hearing aids dry by using Dry Aid Kits – this dries the wax on the hearing aid and allows it to flake off easily when you brush or wipe your aid.
- ⑨ Visit your audiologist regularly, every 6 - 8 months, to have your ear / aid checked.

Itchy and Scratchy

There are as many reasons for your ears to be itchy as there are reasons not to scratch them. The skin of the ear canal and the eardrum is very thin, fragile and easily injured. Any prodding, poking or scratching in the ear canal can cause pain, bleeding, itchiness or even infection.

- Any foreign object in the ear, even a dead hair or dust, may cause itching.
- Earwax in normal amounts is healthy and serves to coat the skin of the ear canal. The absence of earwax may result in dry, itchy ears. Compulsive cleaning of the ear canal would cause one to remove the natural oils and wax which moisturises the ear. The more you clean, the more it will itch.
- Water is notorious for making your ears itch. There is no better breeding ground for bacteria of all kinds than warm, moist ears. Water can get trapped behind wax or even the hearing aid. Keeping water out of the ear is the best you can do to avoid "The Big Itch".
- Having a sinus condition, hay fever or an allergic reaction could also make the ear canals itch. These should be medically treated by either using a medicated eardrop, a sinus spray, anti-histamines or an anti-biotic. See an ENT about it first.
- Skin diseases such as allergic dermatitis, psoriasis, eczema, etc. can cause itching in the ear just as they do elsewhere. These are treated in the same way that they are treated elsewhere on the body, usually by prescription Steroid/Cortisone creams. Again, an Ear-, Nose- and Throat Specialist is the person to see.
- Sometimes an ill-fitting hearing aid can cause discomfort in the ear canal. We need to see both you and the aid to remedy this. It might be a matter of keeping the ear dry and clean, or resheiling the instrument to get rid of any pressure points.
- Having a foreign object in your ear for hours on end is bound sometimes to cause irritation or itching. Where possible, the best advice is some fresh air. If you can't go without it for a bit, line the ear with some vegetable oil, Vaseline or even good old Aqueous Cream. Just take extra care not to get any cream or oil on any of the working parts of the aid. Best to dribble a bit of oil into the ears at bedtime having removed the aids for the night. Wipe dry in the morning.

The World Wide Web



We all have to bow to the wonder of technology at some point or another. Whether we marvel at the smallest cell phone or stare in amazement at a talking fridge, it gets us in the end.

We've had to do the same at The Hearing Clinic.

With all the advances in hearing aids today, from tiny wonders that can be remote controlled to clever amplifiers that can record your sound-activities and learn your habits, we've had to keep up with technology in a big way. Which is why we've turned to the Web.

So for all you computer buffs, we now have a Web Site. Due to the limitations in advertising according to the Health Professions Council of South Africa, we've had to keep things simple, but it's a start.

Visit us at: www.hearingclinic.co.za

We've listed all our rooms, our hours and even taken some pictures to remind you where we are.

A bit of research

In October 2006 we attended our Annual National Conference and a lot of emphasis was placed on subjective assessment of hearing aid performance by the wearers. We felt inspired and thought it might be fun – or at least interesting – to send out questionnaires to assess wearers' satisfaction with their hearing aids. Please complete the questionnaire included and return it to us. We're not promising to get back to you, but you never know!

The purpose of hearing aids is to help people communicate to the best of their ability and to help them hear the everyday sounds surrounding them. When a hearing aid fitting has been successful, your quality of life should be improved. This questionnaire can assist us in assessing whether your hearing aids have helped you optimally in your daily life within the restrictions set by your hearing loss.

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