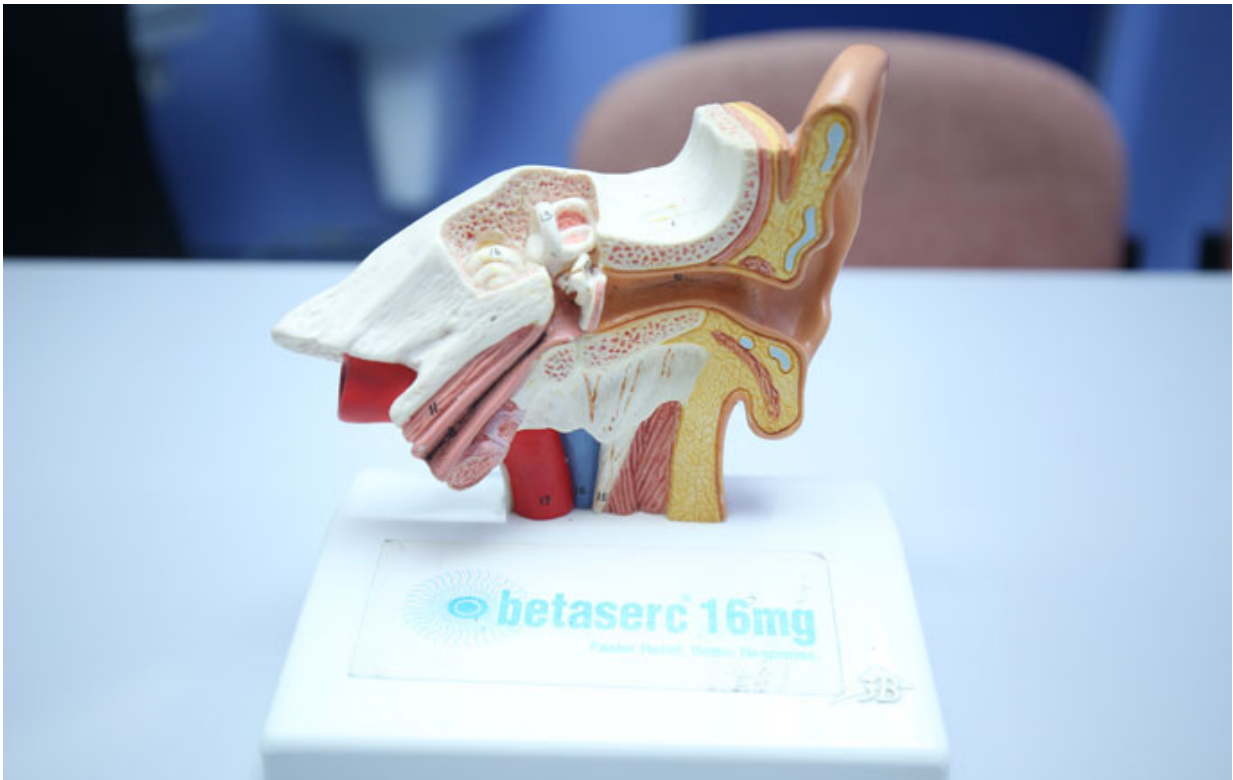


# Why you should stop cleaning your ear with cotton swabs

January 14 2016, by Saiful Bahri Kamaruddin

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Credit: Shahiddan Saidi

Contrary to popular belief, you shouldn't clean your ears with cotton swabs, as this could lead to hearing loss, damage or worse, said Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) Senior Consultant Prof Dr Asma Abdullah of the Canselor Tuanku Muhriz Hospital (HCTM) of The National University

of Malaysia (UKM).

Dr Asma said there are some people who like sticking a cotton swab, or Q-Tip into their ears to remove excess wax and debris.

"Anyone in the medical field can tell you, they have seen many catastrophes resulting from using cotton swabs. From punctured eardrums to super-impacted wax, there are many harmful consequences associated with "do-it-yourself" ear cleaning," she told the UKM News Portal in an interview here today.

She cited a number of items that people use to clean their ears. Among the most common are Cotton buds, Hair Pins, Tweezers, Pens and Pencils, Straws and Paper Clips.

"It's important to realise nothing should be placed inside the ear to remove dirt and debris. This is dangerous and could cause hearing loss or a damaged ear canal.

"The ear canal has specialised cells that produce cerumen, commonly known as ear wax. For some people, ear wax accumulates much faster than others. This can lead to wax build-up that causes decreased ability to hear and in some instances, pain. As an easy way to avoid seeing a medical professional, many people resort to using buds to remove the excess wax. While this may seem like an excellent alternative to spending countless minutes waiting in a doctor's office waiting room, using a cotton swab may do more harm than good.

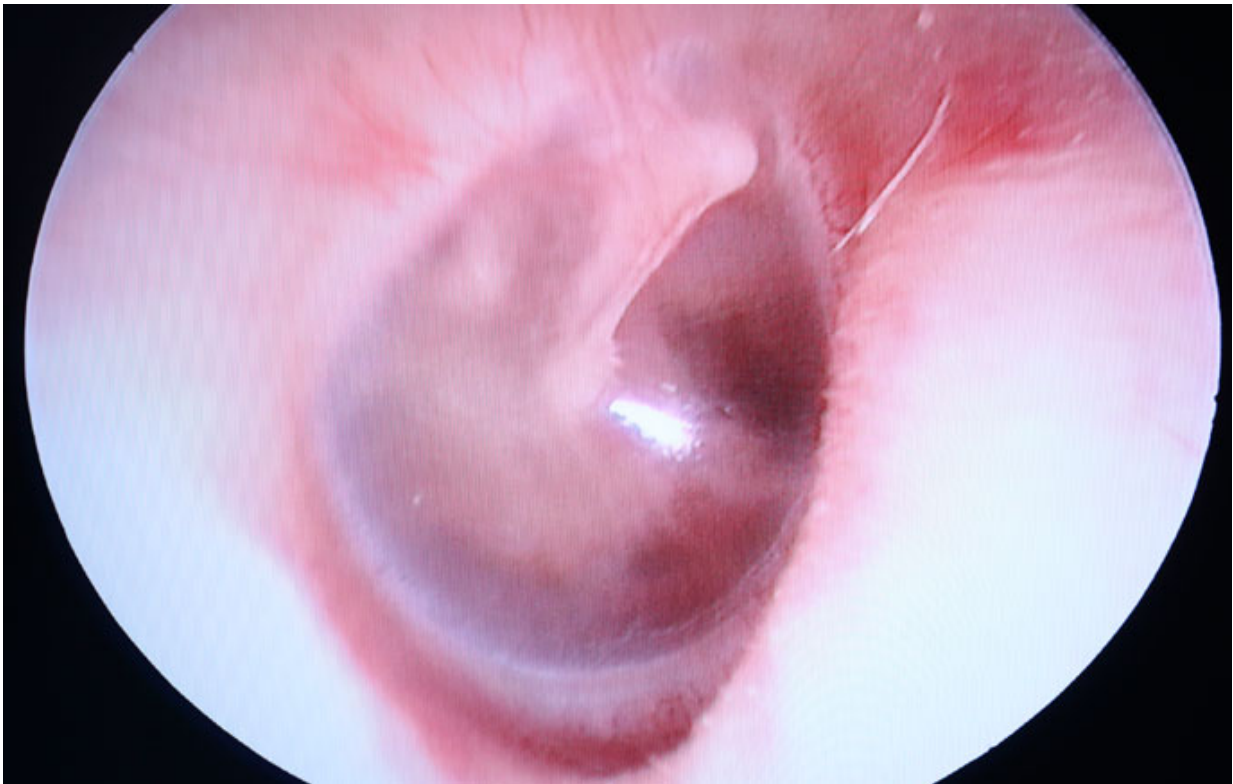


"Because the eardrum is so delicate, it can be easily ruptured If a cotton bud is accidentally pushed too deep. Sometimes during the cleaning of the ear canal, somebody comes and hit the ear. At this moment the ear canal might experience trauma and it can also lead to the bleeding of the ear," she explained.

The senior consultant said anyone who has experienced an ear canal trauma knows it isn't a pleasant experience. The pain is quite severe and the ear may also bleed and lead to hearing loss. While a ruptured eardrum will heal, it typically takes awhile and can even lead to permanent central ear drum perforation and later, might also give rise to conductive hearing loss.

So, do we really need to clean out our [ears](#)? The [outer ear](#) or pinna that can be seen does need a good cleaning every now and then. This can be accomplished with a little soap and water while taking bath.

"In most cases, the ear canal does not need to be cleaned. The skin in your ear canal naturally grows in an outward, spiral pattern. As it slips off, ear wax goes with it. Most of the time the wax will loosen and be absorbed by the body. The need for a [cotton swab](#) isn't really necessary.



"However, for those that have heavy wax build-up, a trip to the doctor may be needed. Doctors can easily remove ear wax with a suction

machine. The process is virtually painless and is very effective in removing impacted wax," she advised.

However 'water irrigation' or 'ear syringing' is not advisable as it can cause sudden increase in pressure in the ear canal. Sometimes if not properly done, this procedure can cause more harm. It can lead to inflammation of ear canal (otitis externa) and also ear-drum perforation.

She said earwax is composed of layers of skin, fatty acids, cholesterol and alcohol all designed to protect the inner ear from water and infections. It also helps prevent the growth of bacteria and fungi in the inner ear.

"But, if you're experiencing discomfort from waxy or hardened buildup in your [inner ear](#), a trip to the otolaryngologist, or ear specialists that can easily remove impacted ear wax using a method that is relatively quick and painless. Your General Practitioner may refer you to the ENT department of your nearest hospital for more specialised treatments such as microsuction or an aural toilet. Microsuction is a quick and painless procedure where a small device is used to suck the earwax out of your ear," she proposed.

She added that eardrops – drops used several times a day for a few days to soften the earwax – can also be used at home.

She added that because of lack of knowledge about ear care, many patients need to spend money in treating an impacted ear wax. When you use the cotton bud, the skin can traumatize. Furthermore the ear wax will be pushed deeper to the middle part of the [ear canal](#). In other words, do not disturb the natural process of the normal physiology of the ear.

Provided by National University of Malaysia

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