

Aural (ear) care services

Who are we and what do we do?

We are nurses within the Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) Department who have had specific training to specialise in ear care – known as ‘aural care’. Patients who need some kind of specialist ear care are referred to us by GPs, ENT consultants and the Audiology Department. We also see patients who need or have had ear surgery, patients who suffer with regular outer ear infections; those who wear hearing aids; or patients who have an underlying problem such as a perforated eardrum preventing them from having other forms of wax removal such as irrigation (formerly syringing).

What happens in clinic?

At each appointment we will take a full history of your ear problem. We will also ask you about other illnesses or problems you may have. Sometimes, these can affect the way we treat you and in some cases can be associated with your ear problem. We will then examine your ears with an auriscope or look in your ear with a small camera. This allows us to see your ear and to show you what your ear looks like - explaining things to you and pointing out significant features.

We will then ask you to lie down on a couch (please let us know if this will cause a problem), so that we can look inside your ear with a microscope and light. Using a small microsuction probe we will suck out any debris or wax to get a good view of your ear drum.

Once your ear is cleaned we will ask you to sit up slowly as this procedure can sometimes make you feel dizzy. This is because the suction affects the fluid in the semicircular canals of the ear. This dizziness is normal, to be expected, and usually passes after a few minutes.

Microsuction can sometimes cause your hearing to change temporarily afterwards, but it should return to normal after a short while.

We will then discuss with you the any treatment that you need.

What if I have an infection?

In the case of outer ear infection, we will swab the ear to see which micro-organisms (bugs) are causing the infection. This will be sent to the laboratory for analysis. We will start some treatment; sometimes this will be a cream which contains antibiotic and a low-dose steroid. We use this as it is a good ‘all round’ treatment. We will ask you to come back for a follow-up appointment. If the swab result shows that the treatment you have started is not appropriate then we will telephone you and your GP to let you know, so that a prescription for alternative treatment can be organised for you.

Sometimes, we will give you drops to use - in this case we will give you a separate information leaflet that explains the best way to use these drops to achieve maximum benefit. We will continue to see you until your infection clears up. When it has gone we will give you advice about how to prevent further infections. We will then discharge you back to the care of your GP.

What if I need to be seen again?

If you need regular aural care (if you are a hearing aid user, have a history of ear surgery or cannot have irrigation for medical reasons) then we will let you know at your appointment. We will try to see you as regularly as needed - this is usually every six or 12 months. Often as time goes by we can extend the time in between visits and see you less frequently. Most patients will be discharged.

If you have been seen previously by the Aural Care service and discharged, we cannot see you again unless your GP has asked us to.

What if I have a problem and need to be seen sooner?

If you do have a problem between your appointments you can telephone the department to bring your appointment forward. If you need advice about an acute ear problem, you can telephone us and we will get back to you as soon as we are able. However, we stress that your GP should be your first port of call for any problems.

What if I want to see a doctor or audiologist?

If you would like to see a doctor at any point during your care then we will try to arrange this. If it is not possible to see one at the same time as your aural care appointment, we will write to your consultant and request an appointment.

Please note we can only refer you to the doctor if the problem you want to see them for relates to your ears. If it is a different problem you will have to see your GP for a separate referral.

If you have a problem with your hearing we can request a hearing test for you. If this then shows you would benefit from a hearing aid, the audiologist will arrange this for you.

How to contact us

ENT Department

Tel: 0118 322 7146 / Fax: 0118 322 7147

For further information about the Trust, visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

Based on an Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust leaflet

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