

Itchy Ears

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ENT North

One of the most common causes of itchy ears is the use of cotton buds – often, ironically, used to scratch the itch. The microscopic scratches caused by the cotton bud cause itchiness as they heal, and can also promote infection. The infection itself often causes itchiness as well.

Another cause can be inflammation of the skin of the ear canal (from chronic dermatitis, eczema or psoriasis). Interestingly some foods (e.g. greasy foods, sugar and starches) may aggravate the condition, thus you might want to try to avoid these.

Treating Itchy Ears

- Stop using cotton buds (or bobby pins, or pen lids, or your fingernail...) to clean your ears. They clean themselves.
- If you need to scratch your ears, feel free to use the tip of your finger either in the opening of the ear canal, or by pressing down just in front of the triangle of cartilage in front of the ear canal and rubbing vigorously. No fingernails into the ear canal, though!
- Try putting a few drops of olive, walnut or almond oil into the canal every few days. Sometimes it is more comfortable to use if it has been warmed slightly first.
- A steroid eardrop (such as Elocon 1% lotion) may be prescribed to reduce the itch and treat any underlying skin irritation. The lotion has the advantage of not 'clogging up' the canal like ointment does.

For a 'one-off' itch, use 2 drops twice a day for two weeks, and then leave the ear alone.

Some people need ongoing drops to keep their ear 'itch-free'. If you find the itch returns quickly after you stop the drops (and you are following the advice above), then try the following regimen:

2 drops, twice daily, for two weeks.

2 drops, once daily, for two weeks.

2 drops, every second day, for two weeks.

2 drops, every third day, for two weeks.... and so on.

At a certain point, your ears may start to itch again – this is your body telling you to use the drops just a little more often (e.g. if you ear itches when you drop down to every fourth day, you need to use them every third day).

If your ear becomes blocked, swollen, or begins to discharge, this is usually a sign of infection, and you need to stop these drops and see your doctor.