

## Water Precautions for Ears

---

### You need to take water precautions with your ears if you have any of the following:

- Grommets
- Perforation
- Recurring ear infections
- Mastoid ear surgery
- Exostoses – “Surfers Ear”

Taking water precautions with your ears is one of the main ways to prevent ear infections.

We recommend the following:

- Take a small piece of cotton wool, (out of an ordinary cotton wool ball you will get approx.10 ear plugs) dip it in a pot of Vaseline then place the cotton wool in the bowl of your ear covering the opening of your ear canal. Then put some more Vaseline on top of the cotton wool liberally with your finger. You need to do this before showering and washing your hair.
- It is the Vaseline that makes your ear waterproof; don't just put cotton wool in on its own because it will soak up the water. When you have finished the water activity, remove the cotton wool and throw it away. Leave any excess Vaseline in place because it's a good lubricator for your ears; DO NOT try to remove it with a cotton bud.

Cotton wool and Vaseline ear precautions are safe, most reliable, easily accessible and affordable.

### Bath

DO NOT submerge your head under the water in the bath.

### Swimming

If swimming, no diving, jumping in or swimming underwater whether or not you are wearing ear protection/ear plugs. When swimming, we recommend the cotton wool and Vaseline precautions, and wearing a swimming cap or protective ear-bands.

Swim plugs are not funded by the NHS unless there is a medical reason for not being able to use the cotton wool and Vaseline or off-the-shelf plug; e.g. if a person had a mastoid cavity.

### Surfing

When surfing, we also recommend the cotton wool and Vaseline precautions, and wearing a swimming cap. Another possibility to protect the ear is a soft prefabricated ear plug, which may cause less hearing impairment than an earplug made of hard material. Some surfers say they find it difficult to hear when in the water; the cotton wool and Vaseline may cause the least hearing impairment, and, when properly used as a new plug each time, will be the least likely to cause irritation and ear infections.

### Ear Plugs

Ear plugs have some problems, in that if you move your jaw the shape of the inside of your ear changes, and you may get leakage. Also, if you aren't meticulous about cleaning your ear plugs every time you use them, they may become

a vehicle for infection themselves. The best way of cleaning a reusable ear plug is to soak it overnight in a safe disinfectant solution such as Milton's.

NEVER use **cotton buds** – you can push the wax further down your ear canal and impact it against your ear drum, which can result in temporary, or, on rare occasions, permanent hearing loss, or tinnitus. There is also the possibility of causing trauma to the ear canal and the ear drum.

## **For People with Grommets:**

From the time of an operation to insert or remove a grommet(s) until a successful 6-week check, you must not swim; and when showering, bathing and washing your hair, you must use cotton wool and Vaseline plugs.

Following a successful 6-week check in ENT, people with grommets may swim without ear protection, but must continue to protect ears in the bath/shower, as here soap and shampoo in the water lower its surface tension, which allows water to penetrate the grommet and may cause difficulties, including discharge and infection. Some grommet patients will not like the sensation of swimming pool water in their ears; for this reason, therefore they may choose to wear ear protection when swimming. WHETHER wearing ear protection/plugs or not however, there must be NO diving, jumping in or swimming below the surface of the water as long as grommets remain in place in the eardrum. The increased pressure may force water through the grommet; although rare, the sudden pressure, particularly associated with diving can dislodge the grommet, tearing the eardrum or even forcing a grommet into the middle ear.

The Trust cannot accept any responsibility for the accuracy of the information given if the leaflet is not used by Royal Devon staff undertaking procedures at the Royal Devon hospitals.

© Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

Designed by Graphics (Print & Design), RD&E (Heavitree)