

Irrigating the Ear

Hilliard Pediatrics, Inc. - Dr. Tim Teller, MD

Introduction

Sometimes, it is necessary to irrigate the ear. This helps remove mucous and wax from the ear canal. When there is mucous in the ear canal, it can be from an infection allowing pus to drain through a tube previously placed in the eardrum or an infection can cause a temporary hole in the eardrum (called a “perforation”), allowing drainage into the canal. Many times, the treatment for the infection will include antibiotic drops. The drainage in the canal can block the drops from reaching the eardrum. Helping to clear the mucous and wax in the ear canal can help the drops work to fight the infection.

What You Need

1. A clean 2 or 3 ounce ear syringe (available at pharmacies)
2. A towel to catch any drainage
3. Bottled or tap water
4. White vinegar (from the grocery store)

What to Do:

1. If you are using tap water, boil the water and let cool.
2. In a clean bowl, mix four (4) parts water and one (1) part vinegar to make the irrigating solution.
3. Warm the irrigating solution to body temperature and test it on your wrist. Anything you flush into the ear canal that is cold will cause brief dizziness, so avoid using irrigating solution that is room temperature. You can warm the solution by putting the microwave-safe bowl in the microwave briefly or you can put the bowl with the solution into a larger bowl with warm water until it has warmed-up.
4. Fill the syringe with the irrigating solution.
5. Have your child sit and place the towel under their ear to catch any solution that runs out.
6. Gently pull the ear towards the back and upward. This helps straighten the ear canal.
7. Aim the nozzle of the syringe into the ear canal and pump the solution into the ear canal. The fluid will only go in about an inch or so and then flow back out.
8. Refill the syringe and repeat the above procedure a few times.
9. Have your child turn their head so that any extra solution drains out.
10. Wipe around the ear to dry the area. If drops have been prescribed, place those into the ear canal. We will instruct you how many times a day and for how long to do this, but it is typical with a draining ear to do it 2 times a day for a week.