Basic Ear Care Procedures

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Session Aims

- By the end of this session you will be able to:
  - Recognise the role of consent in patient care
  - Identify the risks and benefits of ear irrigation
  - Recognise how to use the most common ear care equipment
  - Describe how to safely provide basic aural care and water irrigation
  - Describe how to provide relevant ear care advice
  - Be aware of equipment cleaning guidelines

Using a Jobson Horn & Cotton Wool

- Decide which method of cleaning the ear is most appropriate
- Three main methods available:
  - Superficial Wax Removal / Dry Mopping
  - Ear Syringing
  - Microsuction
Cleaning the canal may be a little tricky at times!

DRY MOPPING –
Using a Jobson Horne probe and a piece of fluffed up cotton wool, the size of a postage stamp, applied to the probe

PRINCIPLES –
A Jobson Horn probe can be used to clear the aural meatus of soft wax & debris from the canal entrance, discharge, or residual water deeper in the canal following irrigation.

• The loop end of the Jobson Horn probe can be used to gently roll out wax from the entrance of the ear canal.
• When doing this it is important to remember how delicate and tender the ear canal is.
• A steady hand is required to avoid touching or rubbing the canal wall.
• The serrated end can be loaded with cotton wool to gently wick out residual water from the ear canal.
• When doing this avoid the temptation to rub the canal. Any liquid should wick up onto the cotton wool when it makes contact.
• A gentle dab will be enough.

A head light should always be used with this instrument.
Using the Propulse Electronic Irrigator

Irrigating the ear is carried out to:

- Facilitate the removal of Cerumen and foreign bodies, which do not absorb water, from the external auditory meatus (Items such as cotton wool, tissue, peas and lentils will expand making removal more difficult)
- Remove discharge, keratin (skin) or debris from the external auditory meatus
- An individual assessment should be made of every patient to ensure that they are appropriate for ear irrigation to be carried out

Reasons for using this procedure

- Correctly treat otitis externa where the meatus is obscured by debris
- Improve conduction of sound to the tympanic membrane when it is blocked by wax
- Remove debris to allow examination of the external auditory meatus and the tympanic membrane
Using the Propulse Electronic Irrigator

Equipment Requirements

- Auroscope
- Head mirror and light or head light and spare batteries
- Electronic irrigator
- Jug containing tap water no hotter than 38°C
- Needles trough / receiver
- Jobson Horne probe and cotton wool
- Tissues and receivers for dirty swabs and instruments
- Waterproof cape and towel or absorbent paper

- This procedure should be carried out with both participants seated and under direct vision, using a headlight or head mirror and light source throughout

A Few Important Points

- Obtain patient’s consent first
- **Written consent** is not usually required for this procedure but this may differ in private practice for insurance purposes
- It must still be **INFORMED CONSENT**
- For this to occur the patient must have the risks and benefits of the procedure explained clearly to them
- If a future appointment is required information leaflets can also be given

A Few Important Points

**Ear Irrigation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risks</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perforation of ear drum</td>
<td>Wax removal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otitis externa</td>
<td>Improved hearing, if affected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary dizziness</td>
<td>Reduced discomfort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasional light-headedness</td>
<td>Reduced itching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discomfort</td>
<td>Hearing aids will not feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td>Temporary tinnitus or aggravation of tinnitus</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Using the Propulse Electronic Irrigator

Irrigation should not be carried out when:

- The patient has previously experienced complications following this procedure in the past. (i.e. severe dizziness, pain)
- There is a history of a middle ear infection in the last six weeks
- The patient has undergone ANY form of ear surgery (apart from grommets that have extruded at least 18 months previously and the patient has been discharged from the ENT dept)
- The patient has a perforation or there is a history of a mucous discharge in the last year
- The patient has a cleft palate (repaired or not)
- In the presence of acute otitis externa where an oedematous ear canal combined with pain and tenderness of the pinna is present

Helpful Ear Care Advice

Occasionally wax in the ear canal may be very thick or hardened. If so it will most likely require some softening before an attempt at irrigation can be undertaken.

There are many wax softening agents on the market but they can be quite expensive. Research hasn’t really shown one product to be better than another. So generally patients can be advised to use cheaper products available such as Olive Oil Drops or Spray [Earol], or Sodium Bicarbonate Ear Drops.

As a rule of thumb:
- Olive oil is used on generally thick wax for 1-2 weeks once daily to soften it further to aid its removal.
- Sodium Bicarbonate Ear Drops is used in the same way for very hard wax. It has a more aggressive action helping to break up the wax.

In both cases patients ears will often become more blocked as the wax expands soaking up the drops.

Cleaning the Propulse Electronic Irrigator

- Chlor-clean tablets are made especially for the Propulse Irrigator so 1 tablet placed in the reservoir and filled with water will be sufficient
- Each day before use or at the end of the day (or end of the ear irrigation session), the electronic irrigator must be disinfected
- Disinfect the irrigator for at least 10 minutes using the Chlor-Clean tablets
  - Fill the water tank with NaDCC solution
  - Run the irrigator for a few seconds to allow the solution to fill the pump and flexible tubing
  - Leave to stand for at least 10 minutes
  - Empty the water tank, and then rinse the system through with tap water before use – ensure the tubing is also cleaned
Guidance for Cleaning Other Irrigation Equipment

- It is more hygienic and often more cost effective to use disposable single use equipment, instead of items that need to be re-sterilised
- Jobson Horne Probe: preferably disposable, otherwise to be sterilised
- Speculum for Otoscope usually disposable – not reusable
- Jet Tip Applicators – disposable not reusable
- Noots Ear Tank can be thoroughly washed and soaked in Chlor-Clean for at least 10 minutes
- Disposable paper mache kidney dishes can be used as an alternative

Guidance for Cleaning Other Irrigation Equipment

- Aural care and ear irrigation are 'clean' - not 'sterile' procedures. However, you must ensure that ALL items of equipment used have been thoroughly disinfected before further use
- ALL equipment must be stored dry and NOT left to soak