

# How to Q-Tip with Savvy

Have you ever heard the phrase “don’t put anything smaller than your elbow in your ear”? Aside from being anatomically impossible, there is good reason to vow never to insert small



objects into the ear canal. As much as I am aware that cotton swabs have great followers, please quit with the Q-Tip! This comes with good reason, especially in the aftermath of flu pandemics. I’m sure everyone who has become vigilant with the hand sanitizers can appreciate the beauty of the anatomy of the ear canal and the purpose of ear wax. Ear wax, also known medically as cerumen, has antibacterial and antifungal properties. It is the body’s natural ear cleaner. Beyond the fact that there is a delicate chemical balance in the ear canal that can be disrupted with overzealous cleaning, I find that persistent users of cotton swabs can actually cause more wax impactions rather than prevent them. A little bit of earwax is a good thing. Unless you are simply cleaning the outside of the ear, and not the ear canal itself, you should stop using cotton swabs. What should you do now that I have told you not to use a cotton swab? Simply let nature take its course. Ear wax is made up of a unique combination of the oils from both the sebaceous gland and apocrine glands. These oil type secretions are similar to sweat glands. As skin debris clears out of the deeper part of the ear canal, it blends with the oils and creates the amber coloured discharge you know as ear wax. In addition to the epithelial migration, the hairs in the first part of the ear canal as well as the S shaped nature of ear canal all help to protect the ear and keep it from building up too much wax. What causes wax build-up in the first place? It is all about body chemistry and anything that affects your body chemistry such as genetics, diet, medical conditions and even exercise and stress can all affect your wax production and impaction. If you suspect you have wax build-up, see your family doctor, ear nose and throat specialist, or audiologist as we have been trained to clean your ear with savvy. In the meantime, quit with the Q-Tip.

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