



Cleaning the Ear

Treatment of outer ear infections

Outer ear infections are a common reason to attend a doctor in Western Africa. This page offers advice on the techniques available for cleaning the ear.

The medications required for treating infective conditions is found within the relevant sections on otitis externa and media.

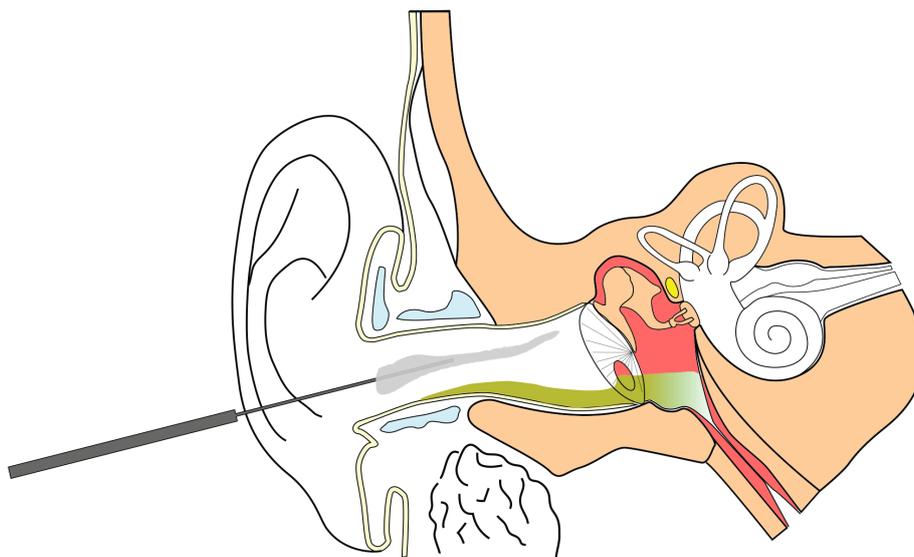
Cleaning the ear full of debris or discharge – dry mopping.

In otitis externa and otitis media with perforation it is important to be able to clean the ear before applying topical agents such as, ointments, creams, ear drops, iodine etc. These medications will work better when the discharge is at a minimum.

Traditionally, dry mopping is the technique of choice for cleaning the ear. It requires minimal equipment, is safe and well tolerated even by small children. Of course, it requires practice and an understanding of the anatomy of the outer ear but, with time, it is possible to completely dry the ear prior to application of medication.

Equipment for dry mopping:

1. Headlight
2. Aural speculum
3. Cotton carrier (e.g. Jobson Horn or orange stick)



In the diagram above (showing an acute otitis media with perforation and pus in the external ear canal) a cotton carrier has been inserted into the ear canal. The cotton will be dipped into the pus and then removed from the ear when the cotton is soaked.

The cotton will then be replaced with a fresh dry piece and the carrier re-inserted to absorb more pus. This process is repeated over and over until there is no pus left.

This works well for pus, wax, debris from fungal infections and from bacterial otitis externa.

Where it is available, suction can be used for cleaning the ear too. This can be done with a headlight and speculum and clears debris rapidly. Suction sound is very loud when the sucker is in the ear canal and some children may struggle if this is tried.