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# AAP News

## News Articles, Parent Plus, Ear, Nose & Throat Disorders, Safety

### Hear this: Cotton-tipped swabs are not made for ears

by Trisha Koriath, Staff Writer

If your bathroom cabinet includes cotton-tipped swabs to clean your child's ears, you might want to move them to the craft drawer, makeup case or cleaning cabinet instead.

Cotton-tipped swabs are not meant to be placed in ears. In fact, pediatricians say the best thing to do with earwax is to leave it alone. Trying to remove earwax can cause problems, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics.

There's a reason people wrongly think swabs are OK to use in their ears. Their inventor created cotton-tipped swabs after seeing his wife try to clean inside their baby's ears with a piece of cotton on the end of a toothpick in the 1920s. Doctors recently found that using cotton-tipped swabs in this manner could cause more harm than good.

They recommend: **"Don't put anything smaller than your elbow in your ear."**

Putting cotton-tipped swabs into the ear canal pushes wax further into the ear. It can cause damage, dizziness and balance problems. A child whose ear wax is blocking the ear may have ringing or fullness, ear pain, itching, discharge, odor and cough. Swabs also may tear or rupture the eardrum causing pain, bleeding and permanent hearing loss.

A recent study found that about 34 children go to the emergency room each day for cotton-tipped swab ear injuries. Most injuries happened when cleaning the ears, especially when the child tried to clean them. Damage to the ear drums was most common for kids younger than 8 years old.

Earwax also can build up if children wear ear plugs or stick their fingers in their ears.

Over-the-counter products can help treat earwax buildup, but some products can lead to more problems. For example, ear candles (also called ear cones) can cause burns, bleeding or can hurt the ear drum, said the Food and Drug Administration (<http://bit.ly/2sdhWx8>).

If the earwax is not causing symptoms or blocking the ear canal, it should be left alone, doctors say. For more information on earwax buildup, visit the [HealthyChildren.org](http://HealthyChildren.org) Symptom Checker at <http://bit.ly/2rxYCcT>.