

Protecting your ears- Important advice for people with diabetes

Patient information leaflet

ENT department

What is Necrotizing Otitis Externa (NOE)?

- A serious ear infection that spreads from the ear canal to the surrounding bone and tissues.
- It is rare but more common in people with diabetes, especially if blood sugar levels are not well controlled.
- Early recognition and treatment are very important.

Why are people with diabetes at higher risk?

- Diabetes can weaken the body's natural defenses.
- High blood sugar encourages infections to develop and heal more slowly.
- Poor blood circulation in the ear canal can make it easier for infection to spread.

Warning signs to look out for

- Severe ear pain, especially at night.
 - Persistent ear discharge (often foul-smelling).
 - Hearing loss or a blocked sensation.
 - Redness, swelling, or tenderness around the ear.
 - Pain when touching the ear.
- ⚠️ If you notice these symptoms, **seek medical advice immediately.**

How you can reduce your risk

- ☑️ **Keep your diabetes under control** – aim for stable blood sugar levels.
- ☑️ **Look after your ear hygiene** – gently wipe the outer ear with a cloth, but do not insert cotton buds, fingers, or objects into the ear canal.
- ☑️ **Protect your ears from water** – keep ears dry when swimming or showering; use earplugs if advised by your doctor. Apply a smearing of Vaseline in your ears in the morning and at night time.
- ☑️ **Treat ear infections early** – don't ignore ear pain or discharge; see your GP promptly.
- ☑️ **Attend your regular diabetes check-ups** – good overall health lowers your risk of infections.

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What to avoid

- ✗ Water entering your ears at all times.
- ✗ Do not scratch inside your ears or use cotton buds.
- ✗ Avoid using ear drops or remedies without medical advice.
- ✗ Don't ignore persistent ear pain or discharge – early treatment is key.

When to see a doctor urgently

- If ear pain is severe or worsening.
- If you have ear discharge that does not clear.
- If pain continues despite simple treatment.
- If you feel unwell, feverish, or develop swelling around the ear.

Remember

- Necrotizing otitis externa is rare, but people with diabetes are more at risk.
- By controlling your diabetes, protecting your ears, and seeking help early, you can reduce your chances of developing this serious infection.

Contacting the team

If you have any further questions or require additional advice, please contact your GP or diabetic nurse.

Your feedback matters

If you would like to give feedback on your care, please contact our patient experience team at paht.pals@nhs.net or **01279 827211**.