

# How to Use Q-tips Safely

The most sure-fire way to use Q-tips safely is not to stick them in your ears. This can help in at least four ways:

1. You won't impact the wax, which can cause hearing loss and other issues. I've taken care of many patients that over time created a petrified cork of hardened wax that my old office manager called Tootsie Rolls upon removal. How do you keep your ears clean otherwise? Easy. Buy an Elephant (ear washer, e.g., from Amazon – use warm water).
2. You won't damage your ear canals from aggressive cleaning/scratching your itchy ears, which can cause an outer ear infection (otitis externa, otherwise known as swimmer's ear).
3. You won't put a hole in your eardrum.
4. Your ENT doctor won't kill you (they are the ones who must pick up the pieces for those who inadvertently cause the above and more).

However, no matter how much the above makes sense, no matter how obvious it may seem that you shouldn't use Q-tips, for whatever reason, some people will insist on using them regularly. And the sad reality is that I am one of those people. Indeed, my name is Doug Cluff, and I am a Q-tip user.

Why on earth would I insist on doing so? I do not use them to remove wax or to satisfy the itch in my ear canal. It is because I cannot stand the feeling of water in my ears. After I shower or swim, I try my best to dry them out with a Kleenex – but that isn't enough. I must insert a Q-tip to dry out the rest, but I do it carefully, gently, and briefly (those are key words). And importantly, I only do it because I know I *don't* have wax (so I don't impact wax that may be present)! You may have to visit your doctor to know that for sure.

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