Nothing smaller than your elbow in your ear!

An unlikely presentation of sensorineural hearing loss secondary to cotton bud use

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Background

Cotton bud use is commonly associated with wax impaction within the external auditory meatus. Overzealous use can lead to otitis externa, and rarely tympanic perforation. Most eardrum holes resulting from injury or an acute ear infection heal on their own within weeks of opening, although some may take several months to heal. (Reference 1)

Methods

A teenage male presented to the emergency ENT clinic having accidentally impaled a cotton bud into his external auditory meatus. He immediately experienced acute dizziness, otalgia and blood stained discharge. He presented to the clinic stating he had decreased hearing from the right ear.

Results

On examination there was a subtotal perforation of the tympanic membrane with bloody discharge in the external auditory meatus. His facial nerve was intact. Audiogram showed severe / profound sensorineural hearing loss, with normal hearing on the contralateral side. A CT IAM was organised for the patient as an outpatient which did not show any abnormalities. A repeat audiogram showed the same results during his first attendance in clinic which was severe / profound sensorineural hearing loss.

Conclusion

In the emergency clinic, he was commenced on oral Prednisolone and topical ciprofloxacin ear drops initially. He was later fitted with hearing aids in his right ear after his repeat audiogram and CT scan. His injury has caused him to have permanent right sided hearing loss which highlights a rare but dangerous sequelae of using cotton buds in the ear.

(Reference 1)

<https://www.entnet.org/content/perforated-eardrum>

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