Earwax
The ear is made up of three different parts. The outer ear is the part you can see, the middle ear is separated from the outer ear by the eardrum and contains tiny bones that amplify sound waves, and the inner ear is where sound waves are translated into electrical impulses and sent to the brain. The ear canal cleans itself with a waxy secretion called cerumen.

Wax keeps the ears clean
The skin lining the ear canal contains glands that produce cerumen. This yellowish-brown waxy substance protects the tissues and helps prevent infection by trapping micro-organisms, dirt, and other irritants. Wax is constantly travelling toward the outer ear where it can drop out. Actions of the jaw, such as talking and chewing, help to ‘massage’ the wax out.

Reasons for earwax blockage or impaction
♦ The most common cause is the use of Q-tips (and other objects such as bobby pins and rolled napkin corners), which can remove superficial wax but also pushes the rest of the wax deeper into the ear canal.
♦ A tendency to produce a lot of earwax
♦ Inflammatory conditions of the scalp or skin
♦ Small, oddly shaped, curved, and/or narrow ear canals
♦ Hearing aid and earplug users are also more prone to blockage.

Symptoms of excessive earwax build up and blockage
♦ Decreased hearing
♦ Plugged or fullness sensation
♦ Dizziness
♦ Ear pain
♦ Ringing in the ear
♦ Itching or drainage from the ear canal

Diagnosis of earwax blockage
A healthcare provider will use an instrument called an otoscope to look into the ear canal.

Home and self-care treatment to soften the earwax and help it to fall out on its own:
♦ Over-the-counter wax softening drops such as Debrox or Murine may be put into the affected ear and then allowed to drain out after about five minutes while holding the head to the side, allowing the drops to settle. Sitting up again will let the drops drain out by themselves.
♦ A bulb-type syringe may be used to gently flush the ear with warm water. The water should be at body temperature to help prevent dizziness.
♦ Ear candling is not recommended. It is very dangerous, may result in serious injury to the ear, and clinical trials showed that it does not remove earwax.

Medical treatment for earwax blockage:
The healthcare provider or ear specialist may remove your earwax with a small plastic spoon called a curette or Irrigate your ear with warmed water, sodium bicarbonate, or other prescription-strength eardrops.

Prevention of earwax blockage
It is not possible to reduce the amount of earwax you produce or widen your ear canals. However, there are ways to reduce the incidence of wax build-up, including:
♦ Use wax-softening drops according to the manufacturer’s instructions.
♦ Avoid cleaning the ear canals with cotton-tipped swabs/Q-tips and other objects that push the wax deeper into the ear.
♦ Treat any associated inflammatory skin or scalp conditions.

Things to remember
♦ Never use Q-tips, other cotton applicators, fingertips, bobby pins, or other sharp objects to remove the earwax! You may accidentally push too hard against the ear drum and cause damage to the ear.
♦ Never use ear candles to remove the wax! This is very dangerous, can cause further damage to the ear canal, and does not remove the wax.

Complications of earwax blockages include:
♦ Perforated eardrum
♦ Middle and/or external-ear infection
♦ Permanent hearing loss from acoustic trauma

Resources:
http://www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides/ear-wax