

EAR CANDLING

The Issue

The practice of ear candling has recently become popular as an alternative therapy. Some promoters say it is an ancient treatment that can cure a number of medical problems. Don't listen: ear candling is dangerous, and has no proven medical benefits.

Background

An ear candle is a narrow, hollow cone that has been soaked in beeswax or paraffin and allowed to harden. During ear candling, the recipient of this so-called "therapy" lies on his or her side while someone else inserts the point of the cone inside the ear. The top of the cone is then set on fire and left to burn for a few minutes.

The health claim most often made for ear candling is that the flame creates warmth and suction, which draws ear wax out of the ear canal. Some promoters also say that ear candling can cure a wide range of medical problems, including ear aches, sinus infections, sinus pain and pressure, and vertigo.

No Medical Benefits – but Lots of Risks

There is no scientific proof to support claims that ear candling provides medical benefits.

In fact, Health Canada conducted laboratory tests that showed that ear candling produces no significant heating or suction in the ear canal.

However, there is plenty of proof that ear candling is dangerous. Ear candling poses a risk of fire. It can also cause serious burns and other injuries if hot wax drips into your ear, or onto your skin or hair. There have been reports of several cases of ear injury in Canada.

In 1996, a report published in the medical journal Laryngoscope concluded that "ear candles have no benefit in the management of cerumen (ear wax) and may result in serious injury." Health Canada agrees.

The authors of the report, all of whom were medical doctors, conducted a survey of 122 ear specialists. They found 21 cases of serious injury caused by ear candling. In six of these cases, patients temporarily lost their hearing. Other problems reported among the group included:

Canada

- Thirteen cases of burns
- Seven cases where the wax from the candle had blocked the ear canal
- One case of a punctured ear drum

Health Canada's Position on Ear Candling

Health Canada's mission is to help the people of Canada maintain and improve their health. As part of this mission, Health Canada is responsible for ensuring that medical devices for sale in Canada are safe and effective.

Health Canada's Medical Devices Regulations state that certain types of medical devices, including ear candles, require a licence from Health Canada before anyone can sell them for therapeutic purposes.

Health Canada has not issued any licences for ear candles. Therefore, the sale of this product for therapeutic purposes in Canada is illegal. As well, both Canada and the United States have issued directives that ban the importing of ear candles.

Some promoters try to get around Health Canada's Medical Devices Regulations by advertising that ear candles are "for entertainment purposes only". However, Health Canada maintains that these people are selling the product illegally, for medical purposes, as there is no other reasonable use for ear candles.

How You Can Protect Yourself

First, Health Canada recommends that you avoid ear candling. It is dangerous and it provides no medical benefits. If you are concerned about ear wax, ask your doctor about safe and effective ways of cleaning your ears. Report any complaints or concerns about ear candles, or any other medical devices, to Health Canada through a toll-free hotline at 1-800-267-9675.

Need More Info?

For more information about ear candles, visit the CBC Marketplace website at:

www.cbc.ca/consumers/market/files/health/earcandle/index.html