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Ear Candling

Updated: November 2011

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IT'S YOUR HEALTH



Ear Candling

THE ISSUE



Ear candling has become popular as an alternative treatment. Some people 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.

WHAT IS EAR CANDLING?

An ear candle is a narrow, hollow cone that has been soaked in wax (beeswax or paraffin) and allowed to harden. During ear candling, the person getting this so-called "therapy" lies on his or her side. Someone else inserts the point of the cone inside their 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 (dizziness). Recently, ear candling was even linked to cancer therapy.

NO MEDICAL BENEFITS – LOTS OF RISKS

There is no scientific proof to support claims that ear candling has medical benefits. In fact, Health Canada ran lab tests that showed ear candling creates no significant heating or suction in the ear canal.

On the other hand, there is plenty of proof that ear candling is dangerous. Ear candling presents 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* said 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 medical doctors, did a survey of 122 ear specialists. They found 21 cases of serious injury caused by ear candling:

- 13 cases of burns
- 7 cases where the wax from the candle had blocked the ear canal
- 1 case of a punctured ear drum

In six of these cases, patients temporarily lost their hearing.

REDUCE YOUR RISK



Health Canada recommends that you avoid ear candling. It is dangerous and has no proven medical benefits. If you are concerned about ear wax, ask your doctor about safe and effective ways of cleaning your ears.

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA'S ROLE

Health Canada makes sure that **medical devices** sold in Canada are safe and effective. Certain types of medical devices, including ear candles, must have a licence from Health Canada before anyone can sell them for therapeutic (medical) reasons.

Health Canada has **not** issued any licences for ear candles. Selling ear candles for medical reasons in Canada is illegal. Both Canada and the United States have banned 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". But Health Canada maintains that these people are selling the product illegally (for medical purposes), as there is no other reasonable use for ear candles.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Report side effects and technical problems with medical devices like ear candles to Health Canada toll-free at 1-800-267-9675, or **report online** at: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/contact/dhp-mps/hpfb-dgpsa/tpd-dpt-eng.php
Please give us as much detail about your medical history and problem as possible.

- For more information about ear candles, visit the [CBC Marketplace](http://www.cbc.ca/marketplace/pre-2007/files/health/earcandle/statement.html) website at: www.cbc.ca/marketplace/pre-2007/files/health/earcandle/statement.html

FOR INDUSTRY AND PROFESSIONALS

For more information about medical device regulations, see Health Canada's [Medical Devices](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dhp-mps/md-im/index-eng.php) website at: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dhp-mps/md-im/index-eng.php

RELATED RESOURCES

- For safety information about food, health and consumer products, visit the [Healthy Canadians](http://www.healthycanadians.gc.ca) website at: www.healthycanadians.gc.ca
- For more articles on health and safety issues, go to the *It's Your Health* web section at: www.health.gc.ca/iyh

You can also call toll free at 1-866-225-0709 or TTY at 1-800-267-1245*

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