



The Truth About Ear Candles

Over the past several years of practicing ear, nose and throat surgery we are often asked about alternative treatments for various problems. Recently, however, we have noticed increased interest in ear candles. Ear wax impactions are very common and people are always looking for home remedies to treat wax impactions because of their busy schedules. Interest has ranged from curiosity to persuasive testimonials. It is not uncommon for our physicians to see patients with a burn to the ear canal from ear candling.

As is usually the case, there is nothing new under the sun. Ear candling is an ancient procedure, which may have originated from Tibet, China or Egypt. Basically, an ear candle is approximately an 11-inch hollow cone impregnated with wax. The small end is placed in a person's ear canal and the opposite end is lighted. The heat from the candle supposedly creates a low level vacuum that draws out the wax as well as other "impurities" not only from the ear but also from sinuses, brain and lymphatic circulation. When the candle is cut open after the procedure, the residues are often proudly displayed as proof that "toxins" were removed.

Ear candling is sometimes offered at spas but also can be purchased over the counter. We have seen rather elaborate kits available on the Internet, which come complete with a lengthy instruction manual and otoscope (ear instrument). For \$75.00 you can even become a certified earconologist. When using ear candles, people describe a soothing experience with the sound of rushing water and a heat that can have a calming sensation. Proponents report benefits not only of wax removal but also the cure of various infections and to open and align charkas and spiritual centers. This sounds very similar to the colonic enemas of the 1980's. The problem is that research has shown that no negative pressure is created with this procedure; therefore it is impossible for wax to be suctioned from the ear. The residues seen are simply residues created by the candle itself. It is possible that some may find this procedure relaxing and helpful; however, my concern is twofold. First, complications are not that uncommon. As physicians we have personally seen ear burns as well as wax impactions made worse by ear candling. Also, we have reviewed cases of eardrum injury requiring surgical repair.

If you are determined to use ear candles, be aware of the potential complications. Secondly, if you feel there is something wrong with your ear, such as a plugged up sensation, you may have a medical problem such as an infection or a more serious condition called sudden sensorineural hearing loss, which requires immediate attention and prompt treatment by one of our ear, nose and throat specialists.

If you know you are prone to wax build up and you know your eardrums are healthy, first try a wax removal medication from your local pharmacy. If you are not sure what is going on, have your ears examined by your family physician or one of our specialists.

Physicians at Advanced ENT and Allergy can gently remove wax with tiny instruments and a microscope with minimal discomfort.

The bottom line is that there is no scientific evidence that ear candles provide any medical benefit and in fact can be harmful. Make an appointment today at any of our eight convenient locations.

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