



It's Your **Health**

EAR CANDLING

The practice of ear candling has recently become popular as an alternative therapy. Promoters claim that ear candling is an ancient treatment that originated in Egypt, Tibet, China, or the Americas.

What is Ear Candling?

An ear candle is a narrow hollow cone made of linen or cotton soaked in beeswax or paraffin and allowed to harden. The patient lies down on his or her side and the point of the cone is inserted into the ear. The top of the cone is set on fire and the candle allowed to burn for several minutes.

The health claim most often made for ear candling is that it draws ear wax out of the ear through the warmth and suction generated by the flame. Some promoters of this practice also claim that ear candling will cure a wide range of medical conditions including ear aches and infections, sinus pressure, sinus pain and vertigo.

The Sale of Ear Candles Is Illegal

Under the Medical Devices Regulations of *The Food and Drug Act*, a medical device of this type requires that the Therapeutic Products Programme of Health Canada issue a licence before the product can be sold. No licenses have been granted for this product, therefore, the sale of ear candles for therapeutic purposes in Canada is illegal.

Some promoters, in an attempt to avoid medical device regulations, advertise ear candles as being “for entertainment only”. However, Health Canada considers that this product is sold for medical purposes since there is no other reasonable use for ear candles. Both Canada and the United States have issued directives prohibiting the importation of this product.

Ear Candling Is Ineffective

There is no scientific evidence to support the medicinal claims of heating of the ear canal and the creation of a suction effect, such as are made by practitioners of ear candling. Various research attempts in Canada, including research conducted by Health Canada’s Therapeutic Products Programme, has failed to demonstrate any significant heating or suction in the ear canal.

Ear Candling Is Dangerous

Ear candling poses a risk of fire and injury to the ear from dripping wax. Even when used according to labeling instructions, it carries a high risk of causing potentially severe skin and/or hair burns and middle ear damage.

Several cases of ear injury are reported to have occurred in Canada. As well, a recent survey of 122 Otolaryngologists in the United States identified 21 ear injuries resulting from the use of ear candles. There were 13 burns of the auricle and external auditory canal, 7 partial or complete occlusions of the ear canal with candle wax and one tympanic membrane perforation. Six patients suffered temporary hearing loss. The authors of the survey concluded that “ear candles have no benefit in the management of cerumen (ear wax) and may result in serious injury”.

Consumers are advised to avoid this dangerous and ineffective treatment. You may report complaints and concerns about ear candles or any other medical device to Health Canada through the Therapeutic Product Programme's toll-free Hot-line at 1-800-267-9675.■

For additional information on ear candles please refer to the following:

1. Daniel R. Seely, Suzanne M. Quigley and Alan W. Langman, Ear candles — efficacy and safety, *Laryngoscope*, vol. 106, pp 1226-1229, October, 1996.
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/htbin-post/Entrez/query?db=m&form=6&dopt=r&uid=8849790>
2. US Food and Drug Administration, Detention without physical examination of ear candles, Import alert # 77-01, September 1, 1998. http://www.fda.gov/ora/fiars/ora_import_ia7701.html
3. CBC Market Place, Ear candling, February 22, 2000.
<http://cbc.ca/consumers/market/files/health/earcandle/index.htm>

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It's Your Health

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