

ENT OTOSCOPIC CLINIC

Ear candling

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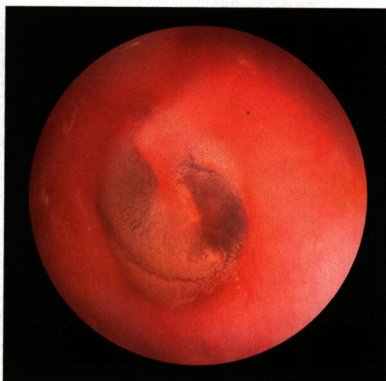


Figure. A thin layer of candle wax is seen on the tympanic membrane.

A 27-year-old man presented with complaints of pruritus of both his ears. He said that he had undergone ear candling the week before. Physical examination detected a thin layer of candle wax from the ear candle on both tympanic membranes (figure). The patient was reassured that the pruritus would resolve, and he was counseled about the risks of ear candling.

Ear candling has been practiced for centuries as a folk remedy that purportedly removes cerumen and "ear toxins." A hollow wax candle is placed in the ear, and the end of the candle away from the external auditory canal is lit. The burning candle is supposed to create negative pressure in the external auditory canal that helps remove cerumen and other material from the ear. When the candle is removed, practitioners claim

that the residue found inside the remains of the hollow candle represents cerumen and toxins, although tests have shown that this material is usually nothing more than candle wax. Indeed, Seely et al demonstrated that ear candling does not produce negative pressure in the external auditory canal and does not remove cerumen.¹ They also surveyed 122 otolaryngologists concerning their experience with this practice; a total of 21 injuries were reported, including burns and injuries related to the accumulation of candle wax in the external auditory canal and on the tympanic membrane.

Reference

1. Seely DR, Quigley SM, Langman AW. Ear candles—efficacy and safety. *Laryngoscope* 1996;106(10):1226-9.

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