

Facts About Earwax and Hearing Loss That You've Never "Heard" Before

As we enter the new year, we start thinking about new beginnings, taking control of our lives, and staying on top of our health. This is the time of year that we make positive changes and better decisions. I want to take time each month to make those decisions with regard to your hearing health easier for you.

I was recently reminded about this subject (earwax and hearing loss) when I saw an article about ear candling, the process of lying on your side while a lit candle is nestled inside of your ear allowing the warmth of the candle to "supposedly" soften the wax to a point where it is suctioned out. My thoughts on this are NO, JUST NO. This process can cause blockage, punctured eardrums, and burns. Always get the advice of an experienced audiologist or hearing healthcare provider before doing anything to your ears! In fact, whenever you are looking to learn more about your hearing healthcare from Dr. Darrow, please visit DrKeithDarrow.com

But I digress. Back to the facts that you may not have "heard".

Fact No. 1 – The Truth About Earwax

The scientific name for earwax is cerumen which is a mixture of oily skin cells inside the ear and secretions from the glands in the outer ear canal. The good thing about earwax is that it helps our ears to clean themselves. That's right, we have self-cleaning ears! In fact, every time you eat - as your jaw moves around during the chewing process - the wax inside of your ears is actually stirring around slowing from your eardrum to the opening of your ear. This is where it will either fall out on its own or simply dry up. Because our ears are self-cleaning, let's let them do their job naturally, never sticking anything in them for risk of impacting the wax or puncturing an

eardrum. Note: earwax lubricates our ears much like tears lubricate our eyes.

Fact No. 2 – Can Earwax Lead to Hearing Loss?

The bottom line is YES, earwax can lead to hearing loss, but because those smart ears do their job well, it is not a common occurrence. You would truly need to have a lot of wax blockage in order to cause significant hearing loss, hence leaving them to do their job naturally. Blockage is a slow "over time" process, and you should have ample warning of any problems, i.e., uncomfortable feelings of fullness in your ears or you are having a hard time hearing, like an underwater sound.

Fact No. 3 – How Can Earwax Affect Our Hearing?

There are two significant ways that our hearing can be affected by earwax:

- 1. Blockage** – This is one of the most common causes of hearing loss if not taken care of properly. Blockage occurs when the earwax is pushed back tightly against the eardrum (or, in rare cases, if your ears are producing more earwax than needed.) The symptoms to look out for include itchy ears, odor, earache, fullness feeling in the ear, dizziness (vertigo), plugged feeling, ringing.
- 2. Infection** – Your risk of ear infections increases when your ears are not healthy. If your ear is either blocked or not draining properly, you could be at risk for serious ear infections, and if not property

taken care of by an experienced hearing healthcare provider you could be looking at temporary hearing loss (and possibly permanent damage!)

Fact No. 4 – Home Remedies

So, we now know that typically your ears will take care of themselves with regard to earwax and that we should leave them alone. However, there are instances where, like stated above, a person may have ears that are producing too much earwax. My suggestion is this – while there are some decent home remedies such as drops or irrigation kits, always check with a specialist before messing around with your ears. Your ears as you age are too important to not take the time to keep them in good working condition. Earwax is generally an easy fix in most cases and seeing a hearing specialist will protect your hearing in the process once the problem is solved. If you wear hearing aids and blockage is a regular issue, be sure to schedule preventative appointments and stay on top of it.

See you soon for the new topic! Until then...hear and be well.

