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FINALLY, A CURE!

Today I want to tell you about an Amazing Home Medical Remedy that you are definitely going to want to try if you are one of the thousands of Americans who have:

1. Ear wax.
2. Fire insurance.

I am talking about an ear-wax-removal product called "ear candles." I swear I am not making this product up. Ear candles were brought to my attention by alert reader Marianna Wright- Newton who sent me an advertisement featuring a cartoon drawing of a man lying down on his side; sticking out of his left ear is a long, tapered object with flames shooting out of the top. This is not a small candle such as you find on birthday cakes. This is more along the lines of the torches that the villagers used to chase the monster out of Dr. Frankenstein's castle.

The cartoon man's mouth is wide open, and he has sort of a strange expression; you can't tell whether he's saying, "This certainly is a fine home remedy!" or "Help! My brain is on fire!"

I sent my order in immediately. At risk of becoming the celebrity spokesperson for this dreaded condition, let me come right out and state that I am an ear-wax victim. There are many of us out here -- lonely, tortured souls, little understood by society. We can't even talk frankly about our condition with each other.

EAR-WAX VICTIM: Let's talk frankly about our condition.

SECOND VICTIM: WHAT?

So we suffer in silent isolation, hiding our shameful little secret, doing our best to "fit in," secretly terrified that one day, in a social setting, somebody will get up and say, "I know! Let's all look inside each other's ears!"

There is no cure for ear wax. You can temporarily remove it via an unpleasant process involving chemicals and a squeeze bulb, but your body just manufactures more. There is a sound biological reason for this; namely, your body is stupid. Your body is constantly manufacturing things you don't need, such as ear wax, fat and zits. Wouldn't it be nice if, just once, your body would manufacture something you could actually use?

BUS DRIVER: You can't get on this bus without a token.

YOU: But I don't have a . . . Wait a minute . . .

YOUR BODY: (Blurp.) (Clink.)

YOU: There you are.

BUS DRIVER: I'm not touching that.

So I sent my order for ear candles off to Quality Health Products, Box 375, Fayette, Ohio 43521, and several weeks later they arrived. There were five candles, which made me wonder about the medical expertise of the folks at Quality Health Products, inasmuch as the typical U.S. resident, according to the most recent census data, has an even number of ears.

The candles are actually hollow cones, about 10 inches long, made of cotton and wax. The brochure states: "Basically, an ear candle is put into the ear and lit with a match by a second person. . . . The flame creates a vacuum which pulls the wax out of the ear into the ear candle." Under the heading "Can anything go wrong?" appears this: "If the ear candle is not well seated in the ear when you start, you might notice smoke coming out the bottom. Stop immediately. Put it out and start over. It lost its draw and was going the other way."

I hate it when that happens.

So I followed the instructions very carefully. I cut a small hole in the center of a paper plate -- which I assumed was supposed to protect my head from burning stuff falling from the candle -- then I poked the skinny end of the candle through the hole and seated it firmly in my ear. Then I lay down on my side, with my head under the plate and the candle sticking into the air. My wife and son and our two dogs gathered to watch. It was a tense moment, kind of like just before they ignite the rockets in the Space Shuttle. At my command, my son, Rob, who is 12 and therefore will cheerfully set anything on fire, including his father, lit the candle. It flared right up, and I could hear a hissing sound in my ear, and I thought to myself: What if something goes wrong here? What would the newspapers say?

MAN KILLED IN EAR BLAZE

Deserved To Die, Authorities Say

But nothing bad happened. In fact, it was kind of a nice, old-fashioned scene, the whole family gathered around to bask in the glow of Dad's ear candle. I'm sorry we didn't have marshmallows.

When the candle had burned down close to my head, Rob, in accordance with the instructions, extinguished it with a wet paper towel. I then pulled the candle out and unwrapped it.

Because this is a family newspaper, I will not go into detail about what was inside, other than to say that everybody was grossed out except the dogs, who displayed the kind of keen interest that they usually reserve for rancid squirrel parts.

So I believe that this is a fine product. Even if you're not an ear-wax, victim, you'd probably find it to be useful in situations where you wish to receive special attention, such as fine restaurants. ("Waiter, please bring our entrees promptly, as my ear candle is burning down.") At only \$2.50 each,

ear candles also make a delightful gift for the new graduate or the young woman who has just gotten engaged. ("Will you marry me?" "WHAT?")