

Q-tip Use

My name is Doug Cluff, and I am a Q-tip user (sincere apologies to my good ENT friends). I do not use them to remove wax or to satisfy the itch in my ear canal. I use them (judiciously) only after I shower or swim to remove the excess water from my ear canals, as I cannot stand the feeling of water in them. If I refuse to stop using them, how can I, in good conscience, tell my patients never to use them?

Nevertheless, in my opinion there are three major reasons why one should NOT use Q-tips, and I have seen the fallout from using them:

1. You may cause an impaction of wax, over time creating a veritable petrified cork next to your ear drum (you should see the kind of plugs my staff and I have flushed out of people's ears).
2. You may perforate or otherwise cause damage to the eardrum.
3. You may irritate the wall of the ear canal and predispose it to an external ear infection (i.e., otitis externa or swimmer's ear).

The solution? Don't use Q-tips. However, if you insist on using them, be smart by:

1. Being gentle and careful
2. Not using them to *clean your ears* (i.e., if they're dirty), but instead to *keep them clean* (i.e., prevent buildup). You must know they are clean before you start, usually by having a doctor examine them, so you don't impact the wax.

Updated October 7, 2009