**ABSTRACT**

Background: A form of acupuncture called auriculotherapy seems to be gaining popularity. The potentially dangerous practice of ear stapling for weight loss and substance abuse treatment is performed across the country and is unregulated in many states. Ear stapling consists of placing surgical staples through the ear to stimulate acupuncture pressure points to supposedly suppress appetite or cravings. The practice is largely unregulated in much of the country despite possibly devastating complications. Here we report three cases of complications from ear stapling that presented to our otolaryngology practice.

Study Design: This study presents a case series of several patients who recently presented to an otolaryngology practice with complications from ear stapling for weight loss treatment. A literature review for evidence supporting ear stapling was also performed.

Results: Ear stapling can result in potentially serious complications including chondritis, severe local allergic reactions to metal and local unsightly granulation tissue growth. An exhaustive literature search of peer-reviewed journals produced no controlled studies showing ear stapling to be effective for weight loss and no literature describing potential complications.

Conclusions: Many who perform the procedure tout ear stapling to be a safe and effective method of weight loss; however, it is somewhat invasive and has potential side effects. Patients considering or already receiving this therapy should be forewarned of the potential complications as well as the fact that there are no adequate studies to demonstrate efficacy of the therapy.

**INTRODUCTION**

Ear stapling (auriculotherapy) is a form of nontraditional medicine derived from acupuncture. Surgical staples are placed in the external pinna at a pressure point practitioners say controls appetite and cravings. Auriculotherapy has been touted as a nontraditional treatment for smoking cessation, drug addiction, pain control and weight loss.

PubMed search results in no English language articles studying the efficacy of ear stapling for weight loss, smoking cessation or drug addiction.

Staples are placed in the ear and often left in place for 2-4 months.

Practitioners charge $50-100 each staple and often place a staple in each ear per treatment.

Ear stapling is loosely regulated at best. Some states classify auriculotherapy as acupuncture and have unregulated licensing requirements.

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**CASE #1**

A 45 year old African American female with a known allergy to nickel. Patient presented to her chiropractor inquiring about auriculotherapy for weight loss. She informed him of her allergy to nickel and was told that the staples would not cause a reaction. She returned to her chiropractor who removed the staples and told her to visit her regular doctor for treatment.

**CASE #2**

A 45 year old Caucasian female with a history of mild obesity despite multiple diet attempts. Patient sought help from “Staple me Thin,” a local nurse that places staples for smoking cessation and weight loss. Patient had staples in place for 2 months and reported a 10 lb weight loss; however, the staples became painful and she developed unsightly granulomas around the bases of the staples. The staples were removed by the nurse who placed them.

**CASE #3**

A 45 year old Caucasian female with a history of mild obesity despite multiple diet attempts. Patient sought help from “Staple me Thin,” a local nurse that places staples for smoking cessation and weight loss. Patient had staples in place for 2 months and reported a 10 lb weight loss; however, the staples became painful and she developed unsightly granulomas around the bases of the staples. The staples were removed by the nurse who placed them.

**CONCLUSION**

The prevalence of obesity in the United States continues to increase. Nearly two out of three adult Americans are either overweight or obese.1 Americans spend an estimated $50-60 billion per year on weight loss programs and services. Ear stapling is one of these potentially costly services. Many who perform the procedure tout ear stapling to be a safe and effective method of weight loss; however, it is somewhat invasive and has potential side effects.

Practitioners may not be using proper sterile techniques, nor counseling their patients sufficiently. Patients considering or already receiving this therapy should be forewarned of the potential complications as well as the fact that there are no adequate studies to demonstrate efficacy of the therapy.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


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