

4 SPA TREATMENTS YOU SHOULD NEVER GET

BY AMANDA MacMILLAN

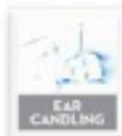
A visit to the spa can help you look and feel your best. But pick the wrong procedure and it can really hurt you. Experts weigh in on what you should avoid at all costs.



DAMAGES

Some risky spa treatments can harm both your health and your appearance.

DANGER
INDOOR TANNING



AVOID

KERATIN-BASED BRAZILIAN BLOWOUTS

AS "PROFESSIONAL USE ONLY" FORMULAS, some Brazilian straightening products employ a noxious mix of chemicals that includes formaldehyde, a substance deemed a likely carcinogen by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

"Exposure can cause eye, nose and throat irritation, as well as difficulty breathing," says Dede Montgomery, M.S., an occupational health and safety specialist at Oregon Health & Science University's (OHSU) Center for Research on Occupational and Environmental Toxicology in Portland.

After a round of bad publicity, many salons began offering what they claimed were "formaldehyde-free" treatments. But OHSU scientists recently found that many of these formulations still contain as much formaldehyde as the original products.

So what's a frizzy-haired woman to do? "Ask your stylist about the specific products they use," says Montgomery. "And then research their websites."

- Look for those that post independent test results
- proving they contain no formaldehyde.





AVOID
INDOOR TANNING

THE 'BASE TAN' IS A MYTH," says DeAnn Lazovich, Ph.D., an associate professor of epidemiology and community health at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. Just like the sun's own rays, tanning beds' ultraviolet rays damage skin cells, increasing cancer risk.

In fact, Lazovich and her colleagues found that people who tanned indoors just 10 hours or less throughout their lives were up to 46 percent more likely to develop melanoma, the most serious form of skin cancer. Those who visited tanning facilities most frequently (100 times or more) nearly tripled their risk compared to those who never baked.

Another sneaky source of those harmful rays at spas: the UV nail lamp, used to dry and harden manicures. These little devices are like miniature tanning booths (they do not always produce heat).

- According to a 2009 report published in the *Archives of Dermatology*, two women were diagnosed with cancerous lesions on their fingers after several years of regular manicures. Opt to air-dry your nails instead.





AVOID
EAR CANDLING

ALTHOUGH IT MAY SOUND WACKY, ear candling turns up in a search on SpaFinder.com at more than 100 spas. During the procedure, a hollow candle is placed in the outer ear and lit as the patient lies on her side. The flame creates a vacuum, which supposedly draws out "toxins." The treatment is suggested for restoring balance and treating chronic conditions like allergies and tinnitus.

"Although candling has been practiced for many years by many cultures, I am not aware of any scientific proof that it's effective treatment for any condition," says Gordon J. Siegel, M.D., an assistant clinical professor of otolaryngology at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago.

Last year, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration issued a warning because the candle's hot wax can drip back into the ear canal, causing burns, blockages and perforated eardrums. "Candling also creates a negative pressure that can blow out or damage the eardrum, which harms your hearing and may require surgery to fix," warns Siegel.

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AVOID

FAT-DISSOLVING TREATMENTS

MANY MEDI-SPAS OFFER LIPODISSOLVE, mesotherapy and injection lipolysis, treatments in which chemicals are injected into the mesoderm — a layer of cells beneath the skin — to “melt” pockets of fat and smooth out cellulite. But there is little research that shows that these procedures work, and there are reports that they can cause scarring, deformity and breakdown of the skin.

“Because there’s no regulation of the compounds that are used and the procedures are often performed in an unregulated medical spa setting, side effects can occur unpredictably,” says Bruce Brod, M.D., a professor of dermatology at the University of Pennsylvania’s Perelman School of Medicine in Philadelphia. “The main concern is that they may break down tissue, causing a chronic inflammatory reaction.”

ILLUSTRATIONS *Katharine Asher*

