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User Says Zicam Robbed Her Of Sense Of Smell

FDA Investigating Zicam Gel, Which Is Applied Directly In Nose

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A nationally advertised cold product that may now be in your family medicine cabinet could rob you or your children of the ability to smell -- to smell gas or a fire in your home or to enjoy the aroma and taste of your food, 7NEWS Investigator John Ferrugia said.

Video



 [Hear How One User Says Zicam Destroyed Her Smell](#)
 [Discuss Zicam With Others](#)
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7NEWS began investigating Zicam a month ago after one of our own employees said she had lost her sense of smell after using it. Now the Food and Drug Administration has begun its own investigation of complaints around the country.

Linda Bayley is finally coming to the realization that she has lost her sense of smell. According to the doctors at the University of Colorado Center for Taste and Smell Disorders, it's not likely she will get it back.

"You just do not have enough receptor cells to know what you are smelling," Dr. Miriam Linschoten told Bayley.

"You know, looking at your whole life and not being able to smell and not being able to have flavors, all because you used a product. I mean, it's just not fair, it's just not fair," Bayley said, sobbing.

Bayley and other consumers around the country claim that that product is Zicam gel, which contains zinc gluconate and is applied in the nose.



Bayley is one of more than a dozen patients Dr. Bruce Jafek has either examined personally or referred to others when they reported the loss of smell after using Zicam Intranasal Zinc.

He is now preparing to publish his findings.

"At least in the majority of the patients we have seen, there hasn't been a return of function," Jafek said.



Jafek says Bayley's experience with Zicam mirrors the stories of others who have used the Zicam compound and lost their sense of smell.

"I put it up my nose, like you are supposed to ... you don't inhale it, and you are supposed to hold your nostril closed ... and the burning," Bayley said. "I had the most intense burning sensation that was just ... I mean, it threw me for a loop, it was so bad. "

The next day, as she picked up her cat, she realized she had a serious problem.

"I was cleaning her cat box and I realized I couldn't smell. I couldn't smell the cat box," Bayley said.

And then she couldn't smell her favorite food -- pumpkin pie.

"When I ate a piece I couldn't taste it. It was just bland mush," Bayley said.

Jafek says the problems of zinc compounds used in the nose are well-known -- they began in the 1930s when people were trying to prevent polio.

"It did not work for polio but was found that about 10 percent of the people lost their sense of smell as a result of the zinc application ... permanently," Jafek said. "Closer to the present day, then it has been used in animal experiments, particularly in fish and rodents, mice and rats, in which the purpose was to put zinc into the nose

and destroy the sense of smell."

But in those cases, a compound of zinc sulfate is used. Zicam contains zinc gluconate. The manufacturer, Matrixx Initiatives, says there is a significant difference in the compounds.

"Not in my mind. The idea in terms of the zinc treatment of a cold is that you want to get the zinc ion into the nose where it will have anti-viral activity," Jafek said.

Matrixx declined an on-camera interview but told 7NEWS in an e-mail: "Statements alleging that intranasal Zicam products cause anosmia (loss of smell) are completely unfounded and misleading."

The company says, "The safety and efficacy of zinc gluconate for the treatment of symptoms related to the common cold have been well established in two double-blind, placebo-controlled, randomized clinical trials."



It also noted, "a multitude of environmental and biologic influences are known to affect the sense of smell."

Both Jafek and Linschoten examined the company's studies and say they simply do not address the safety question.

"Since they didn't test for smell loss before and after, no (these studies) are not relevant," Linschoten said.

"There's no doubt in my mind there's a cause and effect just because I took it, it burned like crazy, the next day I didn't have any sense of smell," Bayley said.

For Bayley, the thought has brought anger, frustration, and an emotional sense of loss.



"You know, the people who are closest to you, your family, it's not something you think about, but being able to smell them -- my little infant, my baby cousin. I can't smell babies anymore," Bayley said. "That human closeness. It's a connection. It's a connection lost."

Zicam makes several products. Only one is in question: the nasal gel or swabs for your nose, which contain zinc gluconate and is listed on the packaging. This does not apply to lozenges or other Zicam products.

In addition to the FDA investigation of complaints, there have now been four separate lawsuits filed against the maker of Zicam. The company has denied liability.

Another nationally known company makes a zinc spray one that people may use. There are reports of similar loss of smell with this product as well.

7NEWS will have more on this story Friday at 10:15 p.m.

Additional Resources

- [Contact The Investigators About This Story](#)
- [Discuss Zicam With Others](#)
- [Zicam's Web site](#)
- [Rocky Mountain Taste and Smell Center at the University of Colorado Medical Center](#)

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