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Truth or Myth? Report Claims AirPods and Other Wireless Headphones Cause Cancer

Some experts argue the radiation emitted from Bluetooth devices is dangerous.

March 29, 2019 By Casey Halter

An article that went viral suggests Apple AirPods and other wireless headphones could be increasing people's risk for cancer. A recent story in Harper's Bazaar looks into the claims.

The original article by Markham Heid was published on the blogging platform Medium. It questioned the safety of the array of Bluetooth devices that infiltrate our daily lives. The article has since been covered by news outlets including Inc., Business Insider, Men's Health and more.

Freelance writer Heid's primary source was Jerry Phillips, PhD, a professor of biochemistry at the University of Colorado, who shared his concerns that the proximity of headphones to the ear canal could be exposing tissues in the head to relatively high levels of radiofrequency radiation—which has been linked to cancer. Phillips also points to evidence suggesting potential concerns for human health and development from cell phones, cordless phones, cell towers, radio Wi-Fi and more.

Before you dismiss Phillips as just another fringe scientist paranoid about emerging technologies, consider that he is one of nearly 250 scientists from 40-plus countries who signed a 2015 petition—which was revised January 1, 2019—to the World Health Organization (WHO) seeking further study on the potential dangers of our increasing exposure to the non-ionizing (low-level) electromagnetic fields (aka EMF) on which Bluetooth and wireless products rely.

The petition warns against a number of potential harms, including increased cancer risk, cellular stress, genetic damage, changes to the reproductive system, learning and memory deficits, neurological disorders and negative impacts on general well-being.

Apple has previously responded to such claims by saying its devices comply with current safety guidelines. In their defense, some folks note that wireless headphones emit far less radiation than cell phones or other mobile devices do.

So what should concerned consumers do in light of these reports? Until these claims are actually

proved, it’s probably not necessary to toss your wireless devices. Nevertheless, the article stokes an ongoing debate about the risks of technology—and the potential threat of increasing amounts of radiation as we become increasingly dependent on technology.

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