



ORAL PIERCING FACT SHEET

What to Know About Oral Piercings

As you get older, you may be faced with new opportunities and decisions, or peer pressure from other people your age. Piercing of body parts other than ears may be common among people you meet or among friends. Oral piercing, or a piercing within the mouth or on the lips, is an especially dangerous type of piercing for a variety of reasons.

Complications that can occur from an oral piercing range in severity, but all should be taken seriously. Here are some common complications:

- Chipped teeth from tongue piercing (could be minor or severe enough for a root canal or surgery)¹
- Increased salivation, or drooling²
- Gum tissue damage, requiring surgery or tooth removal²
- Damage to nerves, causing a loss of feeling in the tongue¹
- Allergic reactions to metal jewelry²
- Choking on or swallowing metal jewelry pieces if they become detached¹
- Infection, due to increased bacterial levels in the mouth¹
- Inability to breathe, speak, chew, and swallow properly if swelling is severe²

Oral piercings can take up to 3 months to heal, during which time you may need to avoid certain foods (spicy, hot liquids, alcohol, alcohol based mouthwash, etc.).³ Additionally, the tongue may remain swollen during this time, making chewing and swallowing more difficult. If an infection does occur, it may spread, causing damage to other parts of the body. Below is an example of a healthy tongue and a tongue infected after a tongue piercing:



Healthy tongue



Infected tongue

If you do decide to receive a piercing, make sure that the salon:

- Is certified with the Association of Professional Piercers (APP).
- Is well-lit and sanitary.
- Uses either disposable or brand new tools and needles –watch that the piercer opens the needle from a sealed sterile package and disposes of the needle in a biohazard container.
- ABSOLUTELY DO NOT receive a piercing from a salon that uses a piercing gun. These cannot be cleaned properly and effectively after each use.¹

The Association for Professional Piercers has developed a list of guidelines to follow when caring for an oral piercing during the healing process. Below are some important steps to follow.³ For the complete list, visit their website at <http://www.safepiercing.org/piercing/oral-aftercare/>.

- To clean a piercing inside the mouth (i.e. tongue), use either antimicrobial/antibacterial **alcohol-free** mouth rise, or a saline solution. To make your own saline solution, dissolve 1/8 to ¼ teaspoon of non-iodized sea salt into 1 cup of water. Making a stronger solution will irritate the piercing and can cause discoloration.
- The mouth should be rinsed with one of the above solutions for 30 seconds after all meals and before bedtime.
- A lip or cheek piercing should be soaked in a saline solution or cleaned with antimicrobial soap at least 2 times a day, for 5-10 minutes. If the piercing cannot be directly soaked, applying gauze that has been soaked in the solution will work.
- Rinse the piercing thoroughly to remove any soap residue.

Ignoring these tips could put you at a greater risk for contracting a deadly virus, such as Hepatitis or HIV or developing a life-threatening bacterial infection.

References:

1. Body Piercing. Center For Young Women's Health: Children's Hospital Boston. 2010. Available at <http://www.youngwomenshealth.org/body-piercing.html>. Accessed June 17, 2010.
2. *The risks of tongue piercing*. Delta Dental; 2007. Accessed June 17, 2010. Form no. 6012.
3. Suggested aftercare for oral piercings. Association of Professional Piercers. Available at <http://www.safepiercing.org/piercing/oral-aftercare/>. Accessed July 28, 2010.