

Oral Piercing

A Fact Sheet



Oral piercing is popular with many people. It is a common form of body art and a way for people to show self-expression.

Piercing the tongue, lips, cheek or other areas around the mouth comes with risks. Before you decide to get a piercing you should know some facts about facial piercing.

If you already have an oral piercing, read on below for some facts about caring for your oral piercing.

Jewelry Related Risks

- Damage to the teeth— the jewelry can chip, crack or scratch the teeth causing damage. It can also cause damage to crowns or fillings.
- Damage to the gums— The jewelry can cause the gums to recede and can injure the gums.
- Problems with oral functions— oral jewelry can cause excessive drooling and increased salivation, problems with speech and chewing and swallowing of food.
- Choking— oral jewelry can come loose and become a choking hazard, it also could be swallowed causing damage to the digestive tract.
- Interference with oral exams— jewelry can block X-rays which are important in oral exams.
- Allergic responses— the metal used in the jewelry can cause allergic responses.

An oral piercing can interfere with speech, chewing, swallowing or dental exams.

Piercing Related Risks

- Prolonged bleeding— damage to the tongue's blood vessels during piercing can cause blood loss that is serious.
- Endocarditis— and inflammation of the heart valves or tissues can be very dangerous.
- Bloodborne disease transmission— oral piercing could be a factor in transmission of hepatitis B, C, D and G.
- Infection— any opening in the skin can be an area that gets infected. Just touching your mouth jewelry can lead to infection and some can be life threatening.
- Swelling & nerve damage— swelling is common after piercing. The tongue can swell so much that it blocks your airway. And it's possible to puncture a nerve during tongue piercing that can cause permanent damage.

Taking Care of Oral Piercings

- Keep the site clean and free of debris that may collect on the jewelry.
- Minimize playing with the jewelry both with your hands and your mouth. It will decrease the chances of infection and tooth damage.
- Make sure the jewelry is tight using clean hands. This will decrease the chances of choking.
- See your oral health care provider regularly and brush and floss your teeth daily.



More Facts About Oral Piercings

If you have a tongue, lip or facial piercing OR if you are considering getting a piercing involving your head and neck area, there are a few things you will need to know in order to stay healthy. Please read the following information carefully and ask questions before you get a piercing.



- During the first two months following any piercing procedure, your piercing will be trying to heal.
- It is very important to clean your jewelry and piercing site twice daily during this time with a non-alcohol containing rinse or cleaner.
- It is important that jewelry be kept in the piercing site AT ALL TIMES during this initial healing phase.
- The most important thing to remember is that before you touch your jewelry, your hands must be clean in order to prevent any infections in the piercing site.



- When choosing jewelry, it is important to look for 'biocompatible' metals—these metals will not react with your body and cause allergic reactions.
 - Look for 316L grade stainless steel. Not all surgical grade stainless steel is the same.
 - Other good jewelry choices include palladium, titanium, and niobium.
 - avoid any jewelry made of silver, gold-plated metal, or plastic. These products may cause irritation to the piercing site which can result in severe scarring.
 - Make sure your piercing is done by someone trained to do it in a safe, sterile environment.
 - Avoid having any piercings done in a mall or beauty parlor setting. Check for proper sterilization of equipment.
 - In order to find a reputable piercer, contact the Association of Professional Piercers ('APP') at www.safepiercing.org to find an APP member in your area.
 - Do not perform piercings on yourself or your friends—many things can and do go wrong which may lead to permanent scarring, infections or illness.
- Piercings involving your tongue, lips, or other areas on your face will swell greatly after being pierced. This swelling will usually go away after about two weeks.
 - An important thing to remember is that when you first have a piercing done, the piercer will use jewelry that is specifically designed to allow for swelling. Tongue piercings, for instance, require initial barbells that are up to 1 1/2 inches long.
 - Once the swelling has gone down, it is very important to change to a shorter barbell so teeth are not chipped or lost due to trauma.