

Body piercing

Client health information

Body piercing has become increasingly popular recently. In the past piercing was mostly limited to ears, but current trends include rings, studs and bars being inserted in the neck and tongue, the upper ears, eyebrows, lips, nipples, navels and genitals.

If you are considering having a piercing done you should read this fact sheet so you know the risks and also the subsequent care for your piercing.

Go to a registered shop

Make sure that the piercing shop you plan to use is registered with their local council. A 'certificate of registration' should be available for viewing. To comply with health regulations:

- The shop must be kept clean and hygienic.
- Instruments and jewellery used to pierce the skin must be sterile.
- The operator should not have exposed cuts or wounds and their clothes must be clean.

Before having a body piercing

- Some operators (piercers) have age restrictions and often ask for parental consent if you are under eighteen. Most reputable piercers will not pierce the genital area of people under eighteen years of age.
- If a piercer says no to piercing you, it is because they have your best interests in mind. Often when this happens, people resort to 'backyard' piercers, do it themselves or get their friends to help them. This is not advisable as these people aren't trained, and the risks of complications and infection are increased drastically.
- If you have a medical condition (eg bleeding disorder, asthma) you should let the piercer know. If you are unsure if your medical condition may affect the piercing procedure you should always ask your local doctor beforehand.

Risks and aftercare

The potential for serious infection occurs during any body piercing procedures. Infections cannot only occur during the procedure, but can also occur if the piercing isn't cared for properly afterwards.

If infections aren't treated early they can lead to serious complications such as blood poisoning.

New piercings are likely to become swollen and are at risk of infection during the healing process. The presence of infection is suggested by increased pain, increased redness and an increase in the amount and thickness of the discharge around the site of the piercing. Infected discharge is usually thick and yellow, green or grey and may have an unusual odour.

If this occurs, see your doctor or piercer and do not remove the jewellery until you seek advice.

Removing the jewellery can allow the piercing to close over the infection and create an even worse problem e.g. a closed abscess (a collection of pus) beneath the skin.

Your piercing should bleed no more than a little at the time of piercing.

Continued and persistent bleeding also requires prompt medical attention.

With all forms of body piercing, the following are recommended practices for aftercare.

- Piercings should be kept dry, as much as possible.
- Always wash your hands before touching the piercing.
- Do not use your fingernails to move the jewellery.
- Do not share jewellery with friends.
- Do not touch or turn the jewellery unnecessarily during the healing process. If you do need to touch it always make sure your hands are clean.
- Do not remove the scab as this protects the piercing from infection.
- When showering/bathing use an anti-bacterial pump action liquid soap on the piercing site.
- After a shower/bath use a tissue or cotton bud to dry the piercing. Do not use a towel or face washer.
- Do not use any alcohol based cleaning solutions, tea tree oil, hydrogen peroxide, skin cleansers, antiseptic solutions or cream. These can dry out the skin and can sometimes result in prolonged healing times.
- Avoid swimming until the piercing has healed as water can pose a risk of infection.

Return to the body piercer or visit your local doctor if you are having problems.

It is important to note that a piercing should not be attempted if there is not enough tissue to support the piercing.

Piercings made in flat areas (eyebrows, wrists etc) often migrate or reject (grow out). The best area to have pierced is one where the piercing will be perpendicular to the tissue, such as an earlobe piercing.

In addition to these general instructions, some piercings have specific risks and require special after care and you should ask your piercer to explain these to you.

Operator requirements

Current best practice guidelines for body piercers recommend that:

Stud guns are only designed to be used on the ears. A piercer should not use a stud gun on any other part of your body.

- Only new jewellery should be used for piercings.

The piercer should:

- Wash their hands at the beginning and end of the procedure, and whenever there is a need to take a break in the procedure such as answering the phone.
- Wear new, disposable gloves throughout the procedure, and ensure that the only things that are touched with the gloves are the client's skin, the needle and the jewellery.
- Use sterile equipment. The piercer should be able to explain how equipment is sterilised and have a steriliser on the premises, or evidence that the equipment has been sterilised off site.
- Use new needles for each procedure, and ensure that they are thrown out immediately after being used into a sharps container.
- Clean and disinfect the client's skin thoroughly before and after the skin is penetrated.

For further information contact your local council health department or the Communicable Disease Control Unit of the Department of Human Services on 1300 651 160.

www.health.vic.gov.au/ideas

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