

Oral piercings

Client health information

Body piercing has become increasingly popular recently. In the past piercing was mostly limited to ears, but current trends include the tongue, the mouth and lips.

Although popular, these can be some of the more dangerous areas of the body to get pierced.

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. Single use disposable gloves should be worn.

Before having an oral piercing

- Some operators (piercers) have age restrictions and often ask for parental consent if you are under eighteen.
- 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

There are a number of risks to consider when undergoing oral piercing including:

Infections

Symptoms of infection include increased pain, increased redness and an increase in the amount and thickness of the discharge around the site of the piercing. The 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.

Aspiration (choking)

Be aware that with oral piercings, aspiration is a risk if the ball unscrews from the bar bell and rolls back down your throat into your windpipe. The ball may then lodge in your lungs. This is a medical emergency: Call an ambulance on **000**.

Lost stud/retainer

A stud or retainer can migrate under the skin or the gum. If you lose a stud or retainer, seek urgent medical attention.

Tooth and gum damage

One risk of oral piercings is chipped or broken teeth. This usually occurs through biting the bar bell, especially in new piercings.

Another risk is eroding of the gums caused by the jewellery rubbing against the gums.

Loss of the enamel at the back of the teeth through repeated rubbing by the jewellery can also occur.

The most serious risk is loss of teeth through bone resorption. Repeated pressure on the teeth or the bone of the jaw supporting the teeth results in destruction of the bone. Eventually the tooth socket dissolves and the tooth falls out. Ask your dentist to x-ray the front teeth when you have your annual check up.

Nerve damage

When considering having your tongue pierced, you should ensure that the practitioner providing the piercing is aware of your oral anatomy. There are nerves at the back of the tongue, which if severed through piercing, could lead to permanent nerve damage.

Bleeding

Areas around the mouth and especially the tongue, have a lot of blood vessels. Even trained specialists must take care not to cut a major artery. Excessive bleeding is a medical emergency.

Aftercare

- Expect to see white material collecting around the balls of your bar bell. This is a sign of healing. Gently clean this material away with a soft toothbrush. Never use undiluted mouthwash or alcohol to clean your piercing.

These will kill the healing flesh. It is best to rinse with salty water (1/4 teaspoon to 1 cup of water).

- Avoid putting anything dirty in your mouth and refrain from kissing and oral sex during the healing period. Viruses such as Hepatitis A, B, and C, and HIV can penetrate any piercing that has not healed.
- Avoid smoking. Smoking slows healing by suppressing your immune system and blood circulation.
- If you see any sign of infection in your oral piercing, contact your doctor and/or dentist immediately, as infections inside the mouth can turn serious quickly.

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 use 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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