



What You Need to Know About Oral Piercings

Body piercing is becoming a popular form of body art and self-expression today, but oral piercings may cause a number of adverse oral and systemic conditions of which you need to be aware. Tongue piercing is performed by piercing the tongue with a medical **needle** encased in a plastic sheath. The **needle** is removed and the sheath left in place. A stainless steel barbell shaped piece of jewelry is placed through the **hole** and the sheath is removed. **If** everything goes right, healing generally takes four to six weeks.

Common procedure-related *medical symptoms* following piercing may include:

- Chronic **pain and swelling** of the tongue that may block the airway.
- Prolonged **bleeding** because of damage to the tongue's blood vessels.
- Risk of **infections** at the piercing site or from unsterilized instruments.
- Transmission of **bloodborne diseases** such as hepatitis B, C, D and G, and HIV.
- Potential risk of endocarditis, a **serious inflammation of the heart** valves or tissues caused by oral bacteria entering the bloodstream, where they can travel to the heart.



There are also a variety of *dental issues* that may arise as the result of oral piercings and associated jewelry.

- Constant contact of the teeth with metal jewelry can cause very **fine fractures** in the surface of the teeth. These fractures multiply and connect over time, and the tooth weakens and results in tooth fracture, chipping, and breaking, leading to potential tooth loss. Likewise, teeth that have restorations can also be damaged if jewelry strikes them.



- **Gum damage** and soft tissue recession can occur, which may be related to size of the piercing and length of time worn (see photo at left).
- You may develop damaged cheek tissue, **permanent numbness** and loss of taste.
- Oral jewelry can stimulate excessive saliva production, interfere with pronouncing words clearly, and may cause **difficulty chewing**, swallowing and breathing.
- If jewelry is not secure you **may swallow it** or inhale it into your lungs.
- Development of a metal hypersensitivity, an allergic reaction to the jewelry, may occur.

A recent study showed that 50% of people who had worn a long barbell stem piercing (longer than 1.59cm) for more than two years had **gum pull away** from the inside of their lower front teeth. Chipping of the back teeth occurred in nearly half of all people who had worn the piercing for more than four years.

If you choose to accept the risk and go ahead with a piercing, **don't do it on a whim**. Ask questions about the procedure and the materials used. Inspect the facility to ensure all instruments are fully and regularly sterilized in an autoclave, and needles and corks are thrown away after each use. Come to see us soon after the piercing so we can check for signs of infections and tell you how to minimize the damage the jewelry may cause to your teeth and gums.

Or better yet, just SAY NO to oral piercings!

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