



Oral Piercings and Oral Health Fact Sheet

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The Challenge...

Oral piercings (oral body art) are a popular form of self-expression which involve perforating the skin and underlying tissue to insert jewelry. The most common oral piercing is the tongue. Other sites include, but are not limited to the lips, upper frenulum (lip tie) and even the uvula.

It may not seem like a medical concern, but oral piercings can affect your overall health through infections, and your oral health, by damaging the nerve of the tooth, gum recession, bone loss, and tissue scarring.¹

What you need to know...

Oral piercing is not new; humans have practiced piercing worldwide since 1500 BCE. Now, due in part to media, it has become an increasingly acceptable form of body art.

Piercing goes into the skin increasing risk for infection. Although much less frequent, bacterial infections from piercings can make it through the bloodstream and damage your heart. Tongue and lip piercings can affect both hard and soft oral tissues. Your dental provider can advise you about the risks of oral piercing, and can help you lower your risk for negative outcomes.²

Ways You Can Help...

- Find a reputable, clean, professional who uses an autoclave and proper infection control techniques. Plastic hardware can reduce damage to teeth, gums, and bone.
- After piercing, clean the jewelry as recommended by the body piercer. Wash hands prior to touching piercing and check jewelry to be sure that it is tight and secure.
- Brush twice a day with a soft-bristled toothbrush and fluoridated toothpaste, floss daily or use an interdental cleaner, and use an alcohol-free mouthrinse.³
- Monitor for signs of infection – pain, redness, white fluid, and seek medical treatment if there are any signs or symptoms of infection.
- Visit your dental provider every 6 months.

Risks include:

- Infection
- Cracked teeth or gum recession
- Nerve damage
- Increased saliva
- Speech impediment
- Swallowing jewelry
- Ludwig's Angina — *a serious infection of the oral tissues that can compromise the airway and even be life threatening. Symptoms consist of painful swelling of the tongue, difficulty swallowing, breathing or speaking.*
- Infectious diseases — *Contaminated piercing equipment can result in the spread of blood-borne diseases, such as hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and hepatitis D, as well as HIV/AIDS.*



Footnotes:

1. <http://www.jeed.in/article.asp?issn=0974-7761;year=2012;volume=2;issue=2;spage=56;epage=60;aualast=Pramod>
2. <http://www.ijohsjournal.org/article.asp?issn=2231-6027;year=2013;volume=3;issue=2;spage=84;epage=91;aualast=Khalia>
3. <http://www.ada.org/en/member-center/oral-health-topics/oral-piercing>

For more information, contact Office of Oral Health

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