

Oral Piercing

So you want to pierce your tongue?

Oral piercing can cause pain, swelling, infection, drooling, taste loss, scarring, chipped teeth, and tooth loss. Most dentists discourage oral piercing because of these risks. Regulations vary in each state, so be careful if you decide to get any kind of piercing. To avoid serious infections such as HN or Hepatitis, make sure that you ask the person performing the piercing about care after the piercing, possible side effects, cleanliness and anything that may concern you. Does the piercer use a fresh needle for every piercing? Some may reuse needles to keep down the cost of the piercing. Make sure they completely sterilize all needles and instruments in an autoclave, which uses extreme heat to sanitize instruments. If they are not prepared to answer your questions in a clear, professional manner, go somewhere else. Also, make sure that they use the right kind of metal, such as surgical-grade stain- less steel. Some people have allergic reactions to certain metals, which can lead to further complications.

Chipped teeth

Fractured teeth are a common problem for people with oral piercings. People chip teeth on tongue piercings while eating, sleeping, talking and simply chewing on the jewelry. The fracture can be confined to the enamel of your tooth or may go deep into your tooth, which may require a root canal or extraction.

Possible infections

Any infection can be serious. See your dentist at the first sign of a problem. It is not unusual for the tongue to swell after being punctured, but in some cases the tongue becomes infected and swells so much that it can cut off your breathing. In rare cases, doctors may pass a breathing tube through a patient's nose until such an infection passes. Dentists are learning that oral infections can lead to infections in other parts of the body. Your mouth has high levels of bacteria. When you puncture any part of the oral cavity, bacteria may find its way into your blood- stream. Bacteria can reach your heart and cause a variety of health problems.

How do I maintain my piercing?

Once your tongue has been pierced, it will take three to four weeks to heal. Barring complications, you will be able to remove the jewelry short periods of time without the holes closing. Some suggest that you remove the jewelry to protect your teeth every time you eat or sleep. Some parlors sell plugs that you can place in the hole, which should allow you to remove the jewelry for as long as necessary.

The piercer will place a larger, starter "barbell" in your tongue to give it enough room to heal when your tongue swells. If you decide to keep the piercing, make sure to get a smaller barbell after the swelling goes down, which will be less likely to get in the way of your teeth and more difficult for you to chew on.

Keep it clean

Keep your piercing clean. Use an antiseptic mouthwash after every meal and brush the jewelry the same as you would your teeth. After the tongue has healed, take the piercing out every night and brush it as you would your teeth to remove any unseen plaque. Consider removing the piercing before eating, sleeping or strenuous activity. If you have any questions about how to keep your mouth healthy, ask your dentist. Also, remember to brush and floss a minimum of twice a day and see your dentist for regular checkups.