

Oral piercing and your oral health

It's important to know some facts about tongue, lip and cheek piercing so you can make informed choices.

Oral piercing involves the insertion of a hole through the tongue, lips or cheeks to place a stud, hoop or barbell. It's usually done without anaesthetic. The best result following the procedure is some soreness and swelling. However pain, swelling, excessive bleeding and damage to teeth can occur.

Sometimes, more serious complications follow. These include:

- > severe infection if strict infection control or sterilisation processes are not followed by the person doing the piercing
- > severe bleeding if the blood vessels are damaged
- > severe swelling causing breathing difficulties
- > nerve damage causing permanent numbness, loss of taste or speech impediments.

Seek urgent medical advice if you experience any of these complications.

If you have a medical condition that makes you more prone to infection, delayed healing or bleeding, speak with your doctor for advice before piercing.

Long-term complications may include:

- > chipped or cracked teeth due to jewellery constantly rubbing against the teeth (particularly common with tongue piercing when the stem is long and made of metal) – fractures can cause severe pain, resulting in the need for a filling, root canal filling, crown or extraction
- > injuries to lip, gum and cheek tissue
- > bacteria and debris collecting around the piercing increase your risk of infection – take care when removing your piercing for regular cleaning to avoid swallowing or inhaling the jewellery
- > sensitivity or allergic reaction to metal (particularly nickel) used in the piercing jewellery
- > exposure to infectious blood-borne diseases such as HIV, hepatitis C and herpes simplex if the technician does not wear disposable gloves during the procedure, or contaminated piercing equipment is not adequately sterilised



- > difficulty with speech and chewing
- > trauma to the soft tissues if the piercing is worn during contact sport.

Piercing may also cause problems with dental treatment:

- > Images on X-rays may be obscured.
- > Numbness following a local anaesthetic makes it more likely a piercing is bitten and teeth are chipped.
- > Risk of injury to the lips or tongue is increased if a piercing snags dental drills or orthodontic wires.

To reduce the risk of injury during dental treatment, you may be asked to remove the piercing prior to your appointment. Where the risk of damage to the teeth or gums is great, you may be advised to consider removing the piercing permanently.

If you have any questions, please talk to your dentist.

To find your local clinic, visit www.sadental.sa.gov.au or call SA Dental Service on 8222 8222.

Check the locality guide in the Yellow Pages for private dentist contact details.

For more information

Telephone: 1300 008 222
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/sadental