



All That Glitters is
! NOT GOLDEN
to Your Oral Health

WARNING: THE DANGERS OF ORAL PIERCING

While many consider having their ears pierced a rite of passage, today's teens and young adults are turning to another type of piercing as fashion statement—oral piercings. An oral piercing is usually a metal hoop or barbell-type piece of jewelry that is placed through the center of the tongue, lip, or even cheek. Many dentists discourage oral piercings, as they can lead to myriad oral health problems.

Are there any potential oral health problems from having an oral piercing?

Yes! In addition to interfering with speaking and chewing, potential complications from piercings can include:

- **Redness and/or swelling at the piercing site.** In certain cases, swelling from a tongue piercing can be so severe that it can actually close off the airway.
- **Infection.** The mouth is full of bacteria that can enter the piercing site and cause an infection. Handling the jewelry with unclean hands can also transmit bacteria. Food particles that accumulate around the jewelry can breed bacteria, as well.
- **Excessive bleeding** can occur at the piercing site from damaged blood vessels.
- **Nerve damage** can develop, including numbness and change in taste, if the piercing is done incorrectly.
- **Allergic reactions** can occur to the metal at the piercing site.



- **Gum recession.** Especially with barbell-type jewelry, the constant rubbing of the metal against the gum tissue can actually cause recession.
- **Damage to the teeth.** The metal jewelry that comes into contact with teeth can actually cause breaks or cracks, especially while eating, talking, or sleeping, or if the wearer continuously “plays” with the jewelry.
- **Excessive saliva production** can lead to drooling and difficulty in pronouncing words.
- The jewelry can also pose a **choking hazard**, especially if it comes loose.



What if, knowing the risks, I still want to get an oral piercing?

Oral piercing is a personal decision. If you do decide to go ahead with a piercing, note that the piercing is done without anesthesia and can take several weeks to heal. Also, do some research and choose a professional piercer who uses a fresh needle every time. Ensure the equipment is properly sterilized and the right type of metal is used—usually, surgical-grade, stainless steel jewelry that is less likely to cause an allergic reaction.

What should I do if I already have an oral piercing?

The Massachusetts Dental Society (MDS) recommends using an antiseptic mouthwash after every meal and brushing the jewelry as you would your teeth.

Once the piercing has healed, consider removing the jewelry before eating, sleeping, or any type of physical activity, and remove the jewelry at night to brush away any unseen plaque with your toothbrush. Also, make sure to have regularly scheduled dental checkups. Your dentist will be able to spot any potential problems, such as soft-tissue damage or cracked teeth.



The Massachusetts Dental Society urges you to consider using your **BRIGHT SMILE** as a fashion statement and avoid oral piercings.



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