

# AGD:FACTSHEET

Compiled for you by the Academy of General Dentistry



## ORAL PIERCING

Oral piercing can cause pain, swelling, infection, drooling, taste loss, scarring, chipped teeth, and tooth loss. Most dentists discourage oral piercing due to the many risks involved. If you do decide to get an oral piercing it is important to understand the regulations, associated problems and proper maintenance.

### What should I know before getting an oral piercing?

Regulations on piercing vary from state to state, so it is important to be careful and find a professional who is prepared to answer any and all questions. They should use a fresh needle every time and sterilize all needles and instruments in an autoclave, which uses extreme heat to sanitize the instruments, to avoid serious infections such as HIV or Hepatitis. Also, make sure that they use the right kind of metal, such as surgical-grade stainless steel. Some people have allergic reactions to certain metals, which can lead to further complications.

### What problems can the piercing cause?

Fractured teeth are a common problem for people with an oral piercing. People chip teeth on the piercing while eating, sleeping, talking or by chewing on the jewelry. It is possible for the fracture to go deep into your tooth, which may require a root canal or extraction.



### Are there serious complications?

While it is not unusual for the tongue to swell after being punctured, in some cases the swelling indicates infection. When that happens, it is possible the swelling will cut off your breathing. In rare cases, doctors may pass a breathing tube through a patient's nose until such an infection passes. Also, rubbing of the barbell on the gums excessively can cause the gums to recede. Any infection can be serious and it is necessary to see a dentist at the first sign of a problem.

### How do I maintain my piercing?

It takes three to four weeks for an oral piercing to heal. Unless complications occur, you will be able to remove the jewelry for short periods of time without the hole closing. Dentists suggest removing the jewelry to protect your teeth every time you eat or sleep. 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, after the swelling goes down, get a smaller barbell which will be less likely to get in the way of your teeth and more difficult for you to chew on.

### Keep it clean

- Use an antiseptic mouthwash after every meal and brush the jewelry the same as you would your teeth.
- After your tongue has healed, take the piercing out every night and brush it to remove any unseen plaque.
- Consider removing the piercing before eating, sleeping, or strenuous activity.

### Does AGD offer any resources for my family and me?

Yes! Check out AGD's Web site, [www.agd.org](http://www.agd.org), to search more than 300 oral health topics, post a dental question, sign up for e-newsletters or find an AGD dentist. Or, calling 1.877.2X.A.YEAR (1.877.292.9327) will put you in touch with an operator who will provide the names, addresses and phone numbers of AGD members.



**Oral infections can lead to infections in other parts of the body.**