

> SO, WHAT ARE WE GETTING PIERCED?

TONGUES, LIPS AND CHEEKS

Although popular, these can be some of the more dangerous areas of the body to get pierced. Complications can include infections, speech impediments, breathing problems, increased tooth decay and broken teeth. Infections can result in blood poisoning, toxic shock syndrome, a blocked airway, as well as the risk of diseases like HIV and hepatitis.

EYEBROWS, NOSE, EAR LOBES AND UPPER EARS

Infections in the area around the eyes and nose can result in serious complications. Pierced ear lobes have been around for hundreds of years. Recently, the trend is towards piercing the upper ear through the cartilage that gives your ear its structure. Ear cartilage is sensitive and slow healing. Infections can cause a 'cauliflower' appearance of the ear. Piercing the side of your nose can also be very painful, and can cause difficulties if you have a cold or runny nose.

NIPPLES AND NAVELS

Nipple piercing in women can create scar tissue that may cause difficulties in breast-feeding in later life. The nipple is very sensitive and therefore can be very painful to pierce. Bellybuttons also should be pierced with care and watched constantly. The moist, warm nature of the navel makes risk of infection a little higher.

GENTITALS

Piercing genitals is a decision that should not be taken lightly. An infection here is not only painful, but can be very serious. It is really important to try and get some advice from a doctor before considering piercing of the penis, labia, clitoris, foreskin or scrotum. Some States and Territories restrict access to these procedures to those aged 18 years and over.

> HIV and other diseases

There are also significant risks of transmission of diseases like hepatitis B and C and HIV/AIDS in unsafe piercing studios and with piercing done by friends or relatives in un-sterile conditions. It is essential that any sign of infection is treated seriously and promptly.

> After the procedure

The body piercing provider should provide you with information about how to care for your new piercing. Remember to make an immediate appointment with your doctor if there are any problems with an area that is pierced that might indicate infection or complications (such as bleeding, pain, weeping or swelling), or that you are worried about.



Infections can result in serious complications

Your local GP:



AMA

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ASK SOME PIERCING QUESTIONS

Important advice about body piercing and health



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BODY PIERCING

Know the risks

Having a part of your body pierced is a very important decision and can have negative health effects if done poorly.

If you are considering having a piercing done read on and check out some of the facts for yourself. By asking a few questions before you get the piercing you can help make sure the health risks are lower.



SO WHAT SHOULD I ASK?

> Do they use a sterilising unit?

Sterilisation is when all living bugs, germs and viruses are removed from the equipment that will be used to perform a piercing. It is very important to ensure that the equipment does not carry disease or blood-borne viruses such as Hep C and HIV/AIDS.

Many places use prepacked sterilised equipment. If so, make sure everything that is used to penetrate your skin is in sealed bags and opened in your presence.

If the equipment is not prepacked, it is important to find out whether the piercer you have chosen has a sterilising unit called an "autoclave". Only an autoclave ensures appropriate sterilisation.

> Do they reuse needles?

Does the studio resterilise used needles? You need to ask this question, it is very important. Unsterile needles can increase your risk of exposure to disease or blood-borne viruses. Make sure that the studio does not use needles that have simply been soaking in liquid. All needles should come in their own packaging and should only be opened in front of you.

> Is the studio clean?

Everything should be clean. If you think the studio is not up to standard, then trust your instinct and do not get a piercing there.



> Ask your friends where they got their piercing done

Friends are a popular source of information. But remember, this doesn't make them experts. Here are some examples of the questions you might want to ask your friends before you get a piercing:

- Where they got theirs done.
- Did they have any problems or infection during healing?
- Would they honestly get another piercing there again?
- Did they feel they were given enough information by the studio about after care?
- Did your friend ask about sterilisation or disposal of the equipment?
- Does the piercing look like something you would be happy with?

> Ask questions of the staff and person doing the piercing

Don't be afraid to ask the piercer and staff some questions. It is a good idea to know everything about the procedure you are considering.

> Ask yourself: Does this person seem knowledgeable?

Talk to the piercer about how long they have been doing this and how they learned. It takes a long time to acquire the ability to correctly place and skilfully perform a piercing.

Don't be led to believe that piercing is easily done. Some piercings can be complex and it is important that those performing a piercing are informed and skilled. It can be expensive to have corrective procedures for problems such as keloid scarring.

> Ask Your Doctor

It is also important to remember that you can talk to your doctor before you decide to have any area of your body pierced.

You doctor will be able to:

- discuss the risks with you;
- warn about possible allergies, infections and abnormal "keloid" scarring;
- tell you how to make sure that the piercing studio is safe;
- talk about how to care for your piercing; and
- show you what to look for and what to do if something goes wrong.

Some doctors are happy to do piercing for their patients in a clean, sterile and safe environment. Remember your doctor can also give you another opportunity to discuss your decision further.

Drugs and alcohol can impair decision making so do not get a piercing done while under the influence. It is best to give yourself some time to think through your decision to get a piercing.