

PIERCING CARE and PRECAUTIONS

Body piercings take time to heal, even with diligent care. Depending on the site of the piercing, expected times for normal healing may vary and special care is required. Here are a few things that are important to know, even before you decide to have body piercing:

- Body piercing should be done *only* with a new, sterile needle, rather than a piercing gun, to reduce risk of exposure to the HIV/AIDS virus and Hepatitis B virus which are both blood-borne pathogens. Piercing guns cannot be sterilized completely.
- All piercings require special care, and some require more care than others. For example, a piercing through the upper rim (helix) of the ear goes through cartilage and takes an average of 2-3 months to heal. It must be cleaned 2-3 times daily during that time. Tongue piercings should be cleansed at least a dozen times per day with antiseptic mouthwash for 6-8 weeks. Navel piercings should be cleaned twice daily for at least 9 months and daily in the shower thereafter.

Cleansing solutions for piercing care

The piercing salon may sell an ear care antiseptic for you to use for cleansing. The active ingredient is usually benzalkonium chloride, which is the same active ingredient in Bactine. Harsh full-strength solutions such as peroxide or Bactine kill germs but can also destroy new healing tissue, so be sure to dilute these solutions with 3 parts water to 1 part antiseptic solution. Likewise, alcohol is not recommended for cleansing new piercings because it too is too harsh and can destroy new healing tissue.

***CAUTION: DO NOT USE HIBICLENS FOR CLEANING ANY PIERCINGS ABOVE THE SHOULDERS. IT MAY CAUSE DEAFNESS OR BLINDNESS.**

Prevention of Infection

There are several precautions you can take to prevent infection of the pierced area and encourage healing:

- Always wash your hands with soap and water before touching the pierced area or jewelry. Keeping the pierced area clean is the most important way to prevent infection.
- Cleanse the piercing site with appropriate solution as frequently as recommended for that particular site, and for the full length of time recommended for healing (see third paragraph).
- Keep pierced area free of chemicals such as perfume, hair spray or hair gel. After showering, rinse the pierced area with clear water to remove soap or shampoo residue.
- Do not hold another's telephone against a newly pierced ear. Clean your telephone frequently with a disinfectant.
- A gauze pad or cotton swab can be used to clean crusts from around the jewelry. Use a new swab for each piercing site. Jewelry should be rotated once or twice while applying solution during each cleaning.
- Earrings should not be removed or changed for at least a month, and should be worn continually for the first 4 to 6 months. Other piercing sites may require more specific care.

What to do if an Infection Develops

- If signs of infection (increased redness, tenderness, heat, swelling) occur in a piercing that is through cartilage, seek medical treatment with antibiotics immediately. An infection of a piercing in cartilage may form a permanent swollen lump (keloid) on the ear.

- Mild infections of the ear lobe (soft tissue) may be treated with proper cleaning and the local use of antibiotic ointment daily for one to two weeks. Jewelry should be left in to allow drainage of exudates. If no improvement, medical evaluation and treatment is recommended.
- If you have a nasal piercing and signs of infection (increased redness, tenderness, heat, swelling) occur, you must seek medical care immediately. Infection of nasal piercings can spread to the brain and cause serious complications.

Contact your physician if you have any questions or problems.