

# *Tongue Piercing: Don't be tongue-tied if you think you want it pierced*



Ask questions and know the risks before you (or your child) venture out for any form of oral piercing. Tongue, cheek and lip piercing may not be as cool — or as safe — as you might think. Besides the pain of the procedure itself (typically done without anesthesia), there can be real serious consequences for your teeth, speech and overall health as a result of the piercing as well as the mouth jewelry. For these reasons, oral piercing is not recommended by dental professionals.

## **A fad with real risks**

- Infection around piercing site. The mouth is a hotbed of bacteria.
- Excessive bleeding can result if the piercing needle damages a tongue blood vessel.
- Possible nerve damage and permanent numbness around the site. Constant movement of tongue (unlike earlobe piercing) can slow and interfere with healing.
- Piercing the tongue may cause it to swell, even to the point of blocking the airway.

- Possible bloodborne disease transmission of hepatitis (hepatitis B, C, D and G) as identified by the National Institutes of Health.
- Increased likelihood of secondary infections because oral bacteria can enter the bloodstream. Infection can even travel to the heart with life-threatening consequences.

## **Complications from mouth jewelry**

- Chipped or cracked teeth from contact with ornaments such as studs, barbells and hoops in tongue, lips or cheek.

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- Gum injury and chronic irritation if jewelry is constantly rubbing on soft tissue.
- Difficulty in chewing, swallowing and speaking.
- Slurred speech caused by excessive saliva production stimulated by jewelry.
- Oral hygiene problems around the jewelry.
- Choking hazard from loose mouth jewelry.

Because of the numerous possible negative dental and health outcomes, the American Dental Association opposes oral piercing. When young people realize that these common complications could happen to them, the wise shift their fashion focus to less risky expressions of individuality.

