

PIERCING AFTERCARE

Information for the general public

Porcupine Health Unit, Public Health Inspection Services, Infection Control

Most infections relating to body piercing or ear lobe piercing are due to improper aftercare. This document provides information on how to care for your piercing while it is healing. It may have been provided to you if your ear lobe was pierced using a mechanical piercing device (piercing gun), but if you have had body piercing, these instructions are only minimum requirements. Professional body piercers will provide you with more information on how to care for your specific piercing (oral piercings for example), and will be able to advise you of the appropriate type of jewellery and piercing, as well as answer any of your questions regarding body piercing.

To avoid the possibility of contracting an infection, prior to a piercing procedure the skin must be cleansed with an antiseptic such as alcohol or iodine to destroy resident microorganisms on your skin (normal flora).

Never use a piercing gun for any part of the body other than the lobe of the ear

- **Always wash your hands thoroughly and immediately before touching your jewellery or pierced area.** Contaminated hands and dirty fingers are the most common cause of infection. Waterless hand antiseptics may also be used for hand hygiene, but if hands are visibly dirty, they must be washed with soap and water prior to using waterless hand antiseptics.
- **Never touch, turn or move your jewellery when the wound is dry (only when wet - during cleaning).**
- A good quality, mild, fragrance-free liquid soap may be used to wash your hands (especially your hands), the piercing and pierced area during healing. If hands or skin around the pierced area becomes dry and cracked, switch to a milder soap, and / or always use a moisturizer on hands **after** having cleaned and dried the piercing and pierced area.
- Any crusted matter (dead white blood cells / dried lymphatic fluid) which collects at the piercing site and creates tightness around the jewellery, is part of normal healing. It may be softened, loosened and removed by soaking the piercing in warm water (cupping with clean hands in the shower or using a clean, disposable plastic cup). A weakly diluted solution of non-iodized sea salt/Epsom salts and warm to hot water or a saline solution may also be used to soak the piercing. A clean swab may be used to gently remove the loose, softened crusted matter after soaking. **Do not pick at it when it is dry** as this can tear the skin inside your piercing. Once crusted matter is no longer present, switch to a mild liquid soap.
- After having removed any crusted matter, lather soap in your hands, and then gently lather soap onto jewellery and work through the piercing by rotating or sliding back and forth, so that the soap is worked into the piercing. Ensure that the portion of jewellery contacting the inside and outside of the piercing is thoroughly cleaned. Allow the soap a minute of contact time prior to rinsing with running water while moving jewellery through piercing to ensure any soap residue is rinsed off (showering is preferable to bathing). Pat dry with a disposable paper towel.
- Do not over clean the piercing as this may cause irritation to the

pierced area. Since your body does most of its healing while you sleep, cleaning the piercing twice a day is sufficient (morning and night). If you are athletic or physically active, a third cleaning may be required if the area has become contaminated with sweat, etc. (sometimes simply rinsing the piercing to remove sweat is sufficient following physical activity).

- **Never** use alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, ointments, creams or moisturizers on your piercing, and avoid using personal care products, hair sprays, heavily perfumed soaps, cosmetic products, make-up, etc. near the area of the piercing.
- For any ear piercings, ensure telephone receivers, headphones, glasses, etc. are always kept clean, and beware of irritating any piercings with clothing, hairbrushes, hats, etc. A suggestion for head piercings is to dress your pillow in a large t-shirt and turn it nightly (provides four clean surfaces).
- Ensure clean bedding is used during the healing period (sheets and pillowcases, etc.) and clean, breathable clothing, are always worn during the healing period for piercings on the body. Keep pets out of your bed.
- Other than normal bathing and showering, or when washing piercing, keep the pierced area dry. Avoid swimming in lakes, rivers, pools, hot tubs, etc., until your piercing is completely healed. Avoid exposing the pierced area to sunlight, sand, suntan lotion, etc. during the initial healing phase.

- Do not closely cover piercing (with a bandage, for example). Allow access to air to promote healing. Do not use any moisturizers or ointments on the piercing or pierced area, as these products will block oxygen from accessing the piercing site.
- A piercing may take from 1 to 6 months to heal and some may take as long as 1 year to heal completely (cartilage, for example). Your piercer will have more specific information on healing times. On average it takes 4 to 12 weeks, but depends on the area pierced, lifestyle factors and the individual's healing ability. A healthier lifestyle will help your piercing heal better. To decrease healing time, get plenty of rest, avoid caffeine, alcohol, smoking and aspirin (Ibuprofen is recommended over aspirin, if required). Drink plenty of fluids and have a well balanced diet (some vitamins and supplements may be helpful as well). A piercing may seem healed before healing is complete, so continue to clean the piercing and pierced area for the recommended period of time.
- Piercings that may be contacted during sexual activity will require the use of barriers such as condoms and dental dams to prevent contact with bodily fluids. For oral piercings, remember that you have an open wound in your mouth that puts you at higher risk of contracting an infection or a STD.
- People heal differently. You may experience some swelling, itching, burning and tightness during healing. Tightness may

remain after healing. Odours from secretions in the area of the new piercing are not uncommon. Bleeding, bruising, tenderness, discoloration and/or swelling are not uncommon at first, but prolonged soreness, excessive swelling or redness, or purulent discharge (pus) may indicate an infection. If these symptoms persist contact your piercer and consult your physician (bring this aftercare information with you when seeing a physician).

- **Never remove the jewellery from an apparently infected piercing.** Contact your piercer and consult a physician. Removing your jewellery may lead to your hole(s) closing up, entrapping the infection, possibly resulting in an abscess. Smaller gauge jewellery (longer to accommodate swelling and thinner to leave space) will act as a shunt, allowing the infection to drain. Since certain sized jewellery is appropriate for the healing phase, it can be changed to a preferred piece of jewellery after the healing period is complete.

**For more information,
contact your local
health inspector
or call 1-800-461-1818.
www.porcupinehu.on.ca**



Source: Ottawa Public Health, Piercing Aftercare Information, April 2007.