



## Piercing Aftercare

\* **DISCLAIMER:** These guidelines are based on a combination of vast professional experience, common sense, research, and extensive clinical practice. This is not to be considered a substitute for medical advice from a doctor. If you suspect an infection, seek medical attention. Be aware that many doctors have not received specific training regarding piercings.

### **CLEANING SOLUTIONS**

Use one or both of the following solutions for healing piercings:

- Packaged sterile saline solution with no additives (read the label), or a non-iodized sea salt mixture: Dissolve 1/4 teaspoon of non-iodized (iodine-free) sea salt into one cup (8 oz.) of warm distilled or bottled water. A stronger mixture is not better; a saline solution that is too strong can irritate the piercing.
  - A mild, fragrance-free liquid soap—preferably anti-microbial or germicidal.

### **CLEANING INSTRUCTIONS FOR BODY PIERCINGS**

- WASH your hands thoroughly prior to cleaning or touching your piercing for any reason.
  - SALINE soak for five to ten minutes once or more per day. Invert a cup of warm saline solution over the area to form a vacuum. For certain piercings, it may be easier to apply using clean gauze or paper towels saturated with saline solution. A brief rinse afterward will remove any residue.
  - SOAP no more than once or twice a day. While showering, lather up a pearl-size drop of the soap to clean the jewelry and the piercing. Leave the cleanser on the piercing no more than thirty seconds.

- RINSE thoroughly to remove all traces of the soap from the piercing. It is not necessary to rotate the jewelry through the piercing.
- DRY by gently patting with clean, disposable paper products. Cloth towels can harbor bacteria and snag on jewelry, causing injury.

### WHAT IS NORMAL?

- Initially: some bleeding, localized swelling, tenderness, or bruising. • During healing: some discoloration, itching, secretion of a whitish-yellow fluid (not pus) that will form some crust on the jewelry. The tissue may tighten around the jewelry as it heals. • Once healed: the jewelry may not move freely in the piercing; do not force it. If you fail to include cleaning your piercing as part of your daily hygiene routine, normal but smelly bodily secretions may accumulate. • A piercing may seem healed before the healing process is complete. This is because tissue heals from the outside in, and although it feels fine, the interior remains fragile. Be patient, and keep cleaning throughout the entire healing period. • Even healed piercings can shrink or close in minutes after having been there for years! This varies from person to person; if you like your piercing, keep jewelry in—do not leave it empty.

### WHAT TO DO

- Wash your hands prior to touching the piercing; leave it alone except when cleaning. During healing, it is not necessary to rotate your jewelry.
  - Stay healthy; the healthier your lifestyle, the easier it will be for your piercing to heal. Get enough sleep and eat a nutritious diet. Exercise during healing is fine; listen to your body.
  - Make sure your bedding is washed and changed regularly. Wear clean, comfortable, breathable clothing that protects your piercing while you are sleeping.
  - Showers tend to be safer than taking baths, as bathtubs can harbor bacteria. If you bathe in a tub, clean it well before each use and rinse off your piercing when you get out.

### WHAT TO AVOID

- Avoid cleaning with Betadine®, Hibiclens®, alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, Dial® or other harsh soaps, as these can damage cells. Also, avoid ointments as they prevent necessary air circulation.
  - Avoid Bactine®, pierced ear care solutions and other products containing Benzalkonium Chloride (BZK). These can be irritating and are not intended for long term wound care.
  - Avoid over-cleaning. This can delay your healing and irritate your piercing.
  - Avoid undue trauma such as friction from clothing, excessive motion of the area, playing with the jewelry, and vigorous cleaning. These activities can cause the formation of unsightly and uncomfortable scar tissue, migration, prolonged healing, and other complications.

- Avoid all oral contact, rough play, and contact with others' bodily fluids on or near your piercing during healing.
- Avoid stress and recreational drug use, including excessive caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol.
- Avoid submerging the piercing in unhygienic bodies of water such as lakes, pools, hot tubs, etc. Or, protect your piercing using a waterproof wound-sealant bandage (such as 3M™ Nexcare™ Clean Seals). These are available at most drugstores.
- Avoid all beauty and personal care products on or around the piercing including cosmetics, lotions, and sprays, etc.
- Don't hang charms or any object from your jewelry until the piercing is fully healed.

## HINTS AND TIPS

### JEWELRY:

- Unless there is a problem with the size, style, or material of the initial jewelry, leave it in the place for the entire healing period. See a qualified piercer to perform any jewelry change that becomes necessary during healing.
  - Contact your piercer if your jewelry must be removed (such as for a medical procedure). There are non-metallic jewelry alternatives available.
  - Leave jewelry in at all times. Even old or well-healed piercing can shrink or close in minutes even after having been there for years. If removed, re-insertion can be difficult or impossible.
  - With clean hands or paper product, be sure to regularly check threaded ends on your jewelry for tightness. ("Righty-tighty, lefty-loosey.")
  - Carry a clean spare ball in case of loss or breakage.
  - Should you decide you no longer want the piercing, simply remove the jewelry (or have a professional piercer remove it) and continue cleaning the piercing until the hole closes. In most cases, only a small mark will remain.
  - In the event an infection is suspected, quality jewelry or an inert alternative should be left in place to allow for drainage or the infection. If the jewelry is removed, the surface cells can close up, which can seal the infection inside the piercing channel and result in an abscess. Do not remove jewelry unless instructed to by a medical professional.

## FOR PARTICULAR AREAS

### NAVEL:

- A hard, vented eye patch (sold at pharmacies) can be applied under tight clothing (such as nylon stockings) or secured using a length of Ace® bandage around the body (to avoid irritation from adhesive). This can protect the area from restrictive clothing, excess irritation, and impact during physical activities such as contact sports.

### EAR/EAR CARTILAGE AND FACIAL:

- Use the t-shirt trick: Dress your pillow in a large, clean t-shirt and turn it nightly; one clean t-shirt provides four clean surfaces for sleeping.
  - Maintain cleanliness of telephones, headphones, eyeglasses, helmets, hats, and anything that contacts the pierced area.
  - Use caution when styling your hair and advise your stylist of a new or healing piercing.

#### **NIPPLES:**

- The support of a tight cotton shirt or sports bra may provide protection and feel comfortable, especially for sleeping.

#### **GENITAL:**

- Genital Piercings—especially Prince Alberts, Ampallangs, and Apadravyas—can bleed freely for the first few days. Be prepared.
  - Urinate after using soap to clean any piercing that is near the urethra.
  - Wash your hands before touching on (or near) a healing piercing.
  - In most cases, you can engage in sexual activity as soon as you feel ready, but maintaining hygiene and avoiding trauma are vital; all sexual activities should be gentle during the healing period.
  - Use barriers such as condoms, dental dams, and waterproof bandages, etc. to avoid contact with your partners' body fluids, even in monogamous relationships.
  - Use clean, disposable barriers on sex toys.
  - Use a new container of water-based lubricant; do not use saliva.
  - After sex, an additional saline soak or clean water rinse is suggested. Each body is unique and healing times vary considerably. If you have any questions, please contact your piercer.

#### **ORAL PIERCINGS**

Use one or both of the following solutions for inside the mouth:

Antimicrobial or antibacterial alcohol-free mouth rinse.

Packaged sterile saline solution with no additives (read the label) or non-iodized sea salt mixture: Dissolve 1/8 to 1/4 teaspoon of non-iodized (iodine-free) sea salt into one cup (8 oz) of warm distilled or bottled water. A stronger mixture is not better. Saline solution that is too strong can irritate your piercing. (If you have high blood pressure or a heart condition, please check with your doctor before using a saline product as your primary cleaning solution.)

#### **CLEANING INSTRUCTIONS FOR INSIDE THE MOUTH**

Rinse mouth with cleaning solution for 30 seconds after meals and at bedtime (4-5 times daily) during the entire healing period. Cleaning too often or with too strong a rinse can cause discoloration and irritation of your mouth and piercing.

#### **CLEANING INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE EXTERIOR OF LABRET (CHEEK AND LIP) PIERCINGS**

Soak in saline solution and/or wash in mild, fragrance-free liquid soap-preferably anti-microbial or germicidal.

WASH your hands thoroughly prior to cleaning or touching your piercing for any reason.

SALINE soak at least two to three times daily. Simply soak directly in a cup of warm saline solution for five to ten minutes. For certain placements, it may be easier to apply using clean gauze saturated with saline solution. A brief rinse afterward will remove any residue.

SOAP no more than once or twice a day. While showering, lather up a pearl-size drop of the soap to clean the jewelry and the piercing. Leave the cleanser on the piercing no more than thirty seconds.

RINSE thoroughly to remove all traces of the soap from the piercing. It is not necessary to rotate the jewelry through the piercing.

DRY by gently patting with clean, disposable paper products. Cloth towels can harbor bacteria and snag on jewelry, causing injury.

### **WHAT IS NORMAL?**

For the first three to five days: significant swelling, light bleeding, bruising, and/or tenderness. After that: Some swelling, light secretion of a whitish-yellow fluid (not pus).

A piercing may seem healed before the healing process is complete. This is because they heal from the outside in, and although it feels fine, the tissue remains fragile on the inside. Be patient, and keep cleaning throughout the entire healing period.

Even healed piercings can shrink or close in minutes after having been there for years! This varies from person to person; if you like your piercing, keep jewelry in-do not leave the hole empty.

### **WHAT TO DO TO HELP REDUCE SWELLING:**

Allow small pieces of ice to dissolve in the mouth.

Take an over the counter, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory such as ibuprofen or naproxen sodium according to package instructions.

Don't speak or move your jewelry more than necessary.

Sleep with your head elevated above your heart during the first few nights.

### **TO MAINTAIN GOOD ORAL HYGIENE:**

Use a new soft-bristled toothbrush and store it in a clean area away from other toothbrushes.

Brush your teeth and use your chosen rinse (saline or mouthwash) after every meal.

During healing, floss daily, and gently brush your teeth, tongue, and jewelry. Once healed, brush the jewelry more thoroughly to avoid plaque build-up.

### **TO STAY HEALTHY:**

The healthier your lifestyle, the easier it will be for your piercing to heal.

Get enough sleep and eat a nutritious diet.

Avoid emotional stress, which can increase healing times by up to 40%.

To help to heal and bolster your ability to fight infection, take nutritional supplements daily, including iron, B vitamins, 1,000-5,000 mg of vitamin C (divided into a few equal doses throughout the day), and 30 mg of inc for women (50 mg for men).

#### **ORAL PIERCING HINTS AND TIPS JEWELRY:**

Once the swelling has subsided, it is vital to replace the original, longer jewelry with a shorter post to avoid intra-oral damage. Consult your piercer for their downsize policy.

Because this necessary jewelry change often occurs during healing, it should be done by a qualified piercer.

With clean hands or paper product, be sure to regularly check threaded ends on your jewelry for tightness (“Righty-tighty, lefty-loosey.”)

Carry a clean spare ball in case of loss or breakage.

Contact your piercer for a non-metallic jewelry alternative if your metal jewelry must be temporarily removed (such as for a medical procedure).

Should you decide you no longer want the piercing, simply remove the jewelry (or have a professional piercer remove it) and continue cleaning the piercing until the hole closes. In most cases, only a small mark will remain.

In the event an infection is suspected, quality jewelry or an inert alternative should be left in place to allow for drainage or the infection. Should the jewelry be removed, the surface cells can close up sealing the infection inside the piercing channel, resulting in an abscess. Until an infection is cleared up, the jewelry in!

#### **EATING:**

Slowly eat small bites of food placed directly onto your molars.

Avoid eating spicy, salty, acidic, or hot temperature foods or beverages for a few days.

Cold foods and beverages are soothing and help reduce swelling.

Foods like mashed potatoes and oatmeal are hard to eat because they stick to your mouth and jewelry.

For tongue piercing, try to keep your tongue level in your mouth as you eat because the jewelry can get between your teeth when your tongue turns.

For labret (cheek and lip) piercings: be cautious about opening your mouth too wide as this can result in the jewelry catching on your teeth.

Each body is unique and healing times vary considerably. If you have any questions, please contact your piercer.

#### **WHAT TO AVOID**

Do not play with your jewelry. Long term effects include permanent damage to teeth, gums, and other oral structures.

Avoid undue trauma; excessive talking or playing with the jewelry during healing can cause the formation of unsightly and uncomfortable scar tissue, migration, and other complications.

Avoid using a mouthwash containing alcohol. It can irritate the piercing and delay healing.

Avoid oral sexual contact including French (wet) kissing or oral sex during healing (even with a

long-term partner).

Avoid chewing on tobacco, gum, fingernails, pencils, sunglasses, and other foreign objects that could harbor bacteria.

Avoid sharing plates, cups, and eating utensils.

Avoid smoking! It increases risks and lengthens healing time.

Avoid stress and all recreational drug use.

Avoid aspirin, alcohol, and large amounts of caffeine as long as you are experiencing bleeding or swelling.

Avoid submerging healing piercings in bodies of water such as lakes, pools, etc.

Each body is unique and healing times vary considerably. If you have any questions, please contact your piercer.