



MEDIA RELEASE

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ADA WARNS TEENS ON DANGERS OF ORAL PIERCINGS

Damage to teeth as a result of tongue and lip piercings is on the increase, and during Dental Health Week, the Australian Dental Association (ADA) is looking to increase awareness amongst Australian teens about their potential impact and offer tips to help teens make informed decisions about oral piercings.

Oral piercings include tongue and lip piercings. In the best case scenario, soreness and swelling will be the only symptoms experienced following the piercing procedure. Damaged teeth, excessive bleeding and infection can occur, in rare cases.

Tongue Piercing

Tongue piercing involves a needle being inserted through the midline of the tongue to place a stud, hoop or a barbell shaped piece of jewellery in the tongue and is usually done without anaesthetic. After piercing, common symptoms include swelling and pain. With no complications, healing usually takes four to six weeks.

Possible side effects following tongue piercing:

Slight bleeding can be expected. There is a risk that blood vessels can be severed in the process of piercing the tongue, which can cause the excessive bleeding.

While swelling of the tongue is expected after piercing, in severe cases, it can swell significantly enough to close off the airway altogether.

Additionally, if an inexperienced practitioner pierces the tongue incorrectly, nerve damage can permanently inhibit feeling in the tongue and facial movement. There are nerves at the back of the tongue, which if severed, could lead to permanent numbness, speech impediments and the loss of taste.

There is also a risk of infection when getting a tongue pierced, especially if stringent hygiene practice is not followed. The procedure of piercing can allow bacteria to penetrate to the inner tissue of the tongue where it has the potential to cause infections. Horror stories have been reported of studs dislodging, and pins or barbells becoming lost inside the tongue, requiring oral surgery to retrieve them.

In the long term, tongue piercings can lead to chipped or cracked teeth, because of the continuous rubbing of the metal/plastic against teeth. Tiny cracks, which are difficult to identify, can form and cause severe pain and a tooth can fracture and leave the nerve exposed. Sometimes, a full crown is the only way to save a particular tooth.

Injuries to the gum and cheek tissue are not uncommon either.

Lip Piercings

Lip piercing is where a ring is placed through the lip. These heal relatively quickly, although extra care must be taken during the healing process as food, smoke and liquids will come into contact with the piercing and might increase the risk of infection.

Retainers on lip rings can also damage gums, and possibly damage nearby teeth. In some cases, gum grafts are required to repair the affected area.

Similar to tongue piercing, nerve damage is also a possibility, affecting facial movement and the ability to feel the affected area.

If contemplating an oral piercing, or if a person already has an oral piercing, the ADA advises:

Tips:

- Ensure that the practitioner performing the piercing is experienced, is aware of your oral anatomy and employs strict infection control practices, to guard against the risk of infection or long-term nerve damage.
- Seek immediate medical advice if excessive bleeding, swelling or pain occurs following a piercing.
- If infection occurs seek urgent medical advice.
- Once the piercing is in place, ADA recommends visiting the dentist every six months. The dentist will be able to closely monitor the piercing, and any potential damage to teeth and this will decrease the likelihood of any long-term damage.
- Athletes undertaking sport should remove their jewellery prior to competing as piercings can be ripped from the skin accidentally.

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