



EUROPEAN  
ACADEMY OF  
DERMATOLOGY &  
VENEREOLOGY

Information Leaflet  
for Patients

# Piercings



## The aim of this leaflet

This leaflet is designed to inform anyone who is interested in getting body piercing about the risks and complications.

# Piercings

## What is body piercing?

Body piercing consists in perforating the skin and the underlying structures such as the cartilage with a sharp tool with the purpose of inserting an ornament or jewel through the created tunnel.

## What are the risks of body piercing?

When performed by an experienced piercer there is little bleeding, bruising and swelling. When the procedure is done in unhygienic conditions with unsterile materials, **infections** can occur. Piercing contaminated skin or skin conditions with a high load of bacteria (e.g. navel) will also increase the risks of infection. Infection of the cartilage of the ear can lead to **chondritis**, resulting in shrinking of cartilage and permanent deformation (cauliflower ear). Deep infections with severe redness, swelling, pain and fever are exceptional and require immediate medical attention.

Every piercing will result in a **scar** which usually will be minimal but occasionally will develop into hypertrophic scar tissue, keloid and **fibroma**. Misplacement, chronic irritation due to an improperly placed piercing, and large or inappropriate piercing materials can also lead to **trauma, laceration, disfigurement, discomfort** and **dermatitis**. This is not uncommon in genital piercings. Also, condom rupture should be considered.

## Which materials are safe?

It is advised to use Nickel free material to avoid **Nickel contact dermatitis**. Surgical steel and titanium are well tolerated. Plastic materials with nonstick properties are suitable for fresh piercings and those taking a long time to heal. Professional piercers can recommend different types and shapes for specific sites.

## Can I get a piercing when I have acne?

It is recommended to avoid areas with active pustular acne and treat acne first.

## Can I get a piercing when I have psoriasis?

It is recommended to select a disease-free area or to treat lesional skin first and delay the procedure until healing is achieved. Damaging the skin in a patient with psoriasis can occasionally evoke new psoriatic lesions. This is called Koebner phenomenon.

## Can I get a piercing when I have atopic dermatitis?

It is recommended to treat lesional skin first and delay the procedure until healing is achieved.

## Can I get a piercing when I have inherited blood disorders?

It is recommended to get agreement of the haematologist and if accepted, You should also consider getting your piercing in areas that can be pressed (like ear lobe) to avoid excessive bleeding.

## Can I get a piercing when I have heart malformation?

The risk of heart valve infection, which can be life threatening, is high. It is dissuaded.

## Can I get a piercing when I have biologic/JAKi?

The risk of infection is too high. It is recommended to refrain from body art procedures which disturb the protective skin barrier.

## How long does it take for a piercing to heal?

Earlobe piercings heal very fast (a few weeks), in contrast to some anatomical sites which require several months to achieve complete healing. Healing time of the nipple, navel and the genital area can easily last for 2-3 months or even more.

### What should I do when my piercing gets infected?

If there are only mild redness, minimal swelling and pain, the area must be rinsed several times a day with saline solution and gauze pad. You can leave the piercing material in site to keep the tunnel open. Within 24 hours the condition should improve. If the redness, swelling and pain increase, discharge of pus is noticed, medical advice should be considered. The piercing material can be temporarily removed to avoid embedding and replaced by a longer soft and flexible piercing retainer to keep the tunnel open. The doctor will decide if antibiotic therapy is required or not.

### General advice

- Get a piercing done by an experienced piercer in a hygienic setting with sterile materials.
- Inform the piercer of your health, your medication and of any allergies.
- If you have known contact allergies (e.g. to disinfectants or cosmetics), you should check that only appropriate products are applied on the skin.
- Follow the after-care advice, as given by the piercer. Clean your hands before touching a fresh piercing. Saline solution is safe to clean a fresh piercing.
- Avoid getting a new piercing on active skin disease. Postpone the procedure and treat the skin condition first.

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While every effort has been made to ensure that the information given in this leaflet is accurate, not every treatment will be suitable or effective for every person. Your own clinician will be able to advise in greater detail.