

Trends, Troubles, and Tips for the Temple

by Rob Kasten

It once was not uncommon to hear the complaints of angry parents after their white and expressionless-faced children came home terrified from the local park or public pool. Apparently, punks, bikers, or even a former inmate had crossed the youngsters' paths. Today, however, children are more familiar and comfortable with piercings that were once associated with society's "undesirables." This is because people from all walks of life can be seen sporting a tongue or labret piercing. Even though body piercings have become quite common, those considering a piercing should know about the rise and history; the risks; and the preparations and after-care of body piercing.

Every day more and more people are walking out of tattoo or body piercing shops sporting a new belly button ring, nose ring, or perhaps a lip ring. Many believe that the popular trend of body piercing is something that is of the present, but for centuries, piercings of all kinds have decorated the bodies of many cultures. Piercings were often considered a rite of passage or showed courage and masculinity (Kinnon). In today's society, people are sporting piercings to create an image; to associate with a group or organization, such as a gang or religion; to rebel; or simply to express themselves. Some are even getting pierced in hopes of finding new sexual sensations. Despite the various reasons for getting pierced, this form of body art has become more accepted in recent years. As stated in an article printed in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, midlife crisis and teenage identity seeking have become two large reasons for the boom in the body piercing business (Tarlach). Furthermore, piercing has become more popular due to athletes, musicians and other highly visible people. In an Associated Press article, Melanie Villanueva, a professional piercer, says, that piercing has become so common that lawyers and health professionals are even sporting rings and studs (Chapple). In addition, a lot of professional women find belly button piercings attractive because they are so easy to hide. Not only are some piercings easy to hide, but they are easier and cheaper to get done than tattoos. As explained in the April 2000 issue of Ebony magazine, piercings can range in price from \$25 to \$150 depending on the piercing and where it is done (Kinnon). In addition, all one has to do to reverse the piercing is to take the ring or stud out. The hole will heal, usually with minimal damage or scarring, within two weeks depending on the location of the piercing. For these reasons, piercing is a form of body art preferred by many people.

Although many get pierced without any complications, there is definitely risk involved when getting a body piercing. There are a few consequences that could happen as a result of a piercing: allergic reaction, infection, and scars and injury. The most common allergic reactions experienced after a piercing are due to the jewelry. Usually nickel or brass-plated jewelry causes the most problems. The allergy commonly causes pussing, crusting, and itchy wounds. The simple solution to this is to use surgical-grade stainless steel, titanium, or 14-karat yellow or white gold jewelry. The same issue of Ebony says that although most allergies are not serious, nickel allergies may induce asthma in some people (Kinnon). Another problem commonly associated with piercing is infection. Infection can be considerably more serious than allergies. Infections include swelling, redness, and tenderness of the area surrounding the wound. One in five body-piercings results in a serious bacterial infection, says the Harvard Medical School Family Health Guide as reported in Ebony magazine. The magazine goes on to explain that the most common piercings that get infected are oral piercings due to the amount of bacteria present in the mouth. Also, teens are more likely to get an infection because many pierce themselves or each other due to the fact that they need the consent of a parent to get a piercing done by a professional (Kinnon). The easiest way to prevent infection after a piercing is to clean the wound and surrounding area thoroughly with antibacterial soap, hydrogen peroxide, or a solution specifically made to clean piercings. In addition to allergies and infections, scarring and injury can occur. People with dark skin, usually from Africa or Mediterranean areas, can develop large scars called keloids. Keloids can only be removed via surgery. More commonly, people suffer minor scarring. Also, injuries such as ripped tissue can occur. Ripped tissue is usually the result of the piercing catching on something. Likewise, numbness, difficulty talking, loss of taste, or breathing problems due to swelling can result from tongue piercing. Other problems that plague those with piercings are broken teeth, gingivitis, and potentially fatal viruses, such as Hepatitis B and C and

HIV-AIDS. Furthermore, people with hemophilia or diabetes should not be pierced. Hemophiliacs should never be pierced for obvious reasons, and diabetics may have problems healing. As a result, those who wish to be pierced should research and know the risks of body piercing before getting pierced.

While those who plan on getting pierced should be aware of the risks of body piercing, it is also strongly recommended that they understand the procedure and know the proper after-care of piercings. At the outset, one should know what to look for in a professional piercing shop. This can be done by talking to others about their piercing experiences and about the shops that they used. In an Associated Press article, Gary Van Voorst, a Sioux Falls, South Dakota, health specialist, suggests that if a shop looks dirty or one gets goosebumps, leave without hesitation ("Sioux Falls"). After a professional piercing shop is found, find out if the piercer has a good reputation, check for sterilizing equipment such as an autoclave, and watch the piercer in action. The piercer should also be knowledgeable about a wide range of piercing topics. This can be determined by asking questions. The more specific the questions, the better. Furthermore, don't be fooled by any certificates; there is no formal training to become a piercer, and, consequently, there is no such thing as a certified piercer. Regardless, a credible piercer will follow some standard procedures when piercing; all potential clients should be aware of these procedures before being pierced. To start with, the area to be pierced should be cleaned with alcohol before being clamped. For piercings other than the ear, a clamp is used to hold the skin. The clamp should be sterile, and the piercer should wear disposable gloves throughout the entire procedure. When making the piercing, the piercer should quickly, but gently, pierce the area with a sterilized needle. This usually involves at least a small amount of pain, which most times will last only a second or two. After the area has been pierced, a stud or ring should be placed in the hole, and the entire area should once again be cleaned with alcohol. Ten to fifteen minutes of relaxation is recommended immediately after a piercing. It takes most piercings a minimum of six weeks to heal. Some piercings, like the navel, take a few months to heal. During the healing period, some simple aftercare should be done. The wound should be cleaned at least twice a day with a mild soap and water. Also, pools, hot tubs, and Jacuzzis should be avoided to decrease the risk of infection. All in all, if research is done on the piercer, procedure, and after-care, anyone can have a successful piercing experience.

Although many piercings are successful, those who don't know about the rise and history, health repercussions, and maintenance of body piercings can run into potentially serious problems. That's why those who understand body piercing can avoid those problems and appreciate the freedom that the art of body piercing has to offer. As a popular saying among body art enthusiasts says, "My body is my temple; I shall decorate it as I please."

Works Cited

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