

The dangers of piercing your tongue

Piercings within the mouth are associated with a variety of risks. Please consider these risks carefully before deciding whether to have your tongue pierced.

Risk of infection: Body piercers must adhere to infection control standards, such as sterilization of needles and other instruments, to prevent disease transmission, but many practitioners are unlicensed and often self-trained. Intraoral piercing has a high risk of infection because of the high levels of bacteria in the mouth. Infection can lead to a variety of health problems.

Risk of dental damage: Intraoral jewelry can injure teeth by chipping or cracking enamel. While cracking may be confined to the tooth surface, it may also go deep into the tooth. This could result in nerve damage, leading to the need for a root canal (a procedure by which the small, tubular channel normally filled with pulp in the root of a tooth is opened, cleaned, and filled) or an extraction. Most dentists discourage oral piercing because of these and other risks.

Tongue piercing is painful, as no anesthesia is used. Complications of tongue piercing, other than those listed above, can include:

- Loss of blood during the piercing procedure
- Compromise of the airway by post-surgical tongue swelling
- Gingival (gum) tissue damage
- Increased salivary flow (drooling)
- Allergic reactions to metal in jewelry
- Impeded speech, chewing ability, and swallowing



Source: American Dental Association, ADA Statement on Intraoral/Perioral Piercing and Tongue Splitting, 2005. <http://www.ada.org/prof/resources/positions/statements/piercing.asp>.