

Nipple piercing

The nipple is one of the most popular body piercing sites for both men and women. Nipple jewellery can be made from gold, white gold, steel or gold-plated steel. Popular varieties include a ring (with or without a bead or pendant threaded through it), a dumbbell and a D-shaped ring with the straight side through the nipple.

To reduce the risk of infection it is important to choose an experienced piercer who works at premises registered by their local council. Hygiene is crucial. For example, if the piercing instruments are not properly sterilised between clients, you may catch a blood-borne virus such as hepatitis B or HIV.

The procedure

Some people attempt to pierce various parts of their body themselves. This is extremely dangerous and not recommended. Choose an experienced piercer who is registered with their local council to reduce the risks of infection and scarring. The procedure may include the following steps:

- The points of entry and exit for the piercing are marked onto the nipple.
- The area is wiped clean with antiseptic.
- The nipple area is anaesthetised or tightly clamped.
- A thin sharp tube, called a canula, is pushed through the nipple, using the entry and exit marks as guides.
- The ring is drawn back through the nipple via the canula.

Complications

Some of the complications of nipple piercing can include:

- Infection of the nipple, which in women can quickly travel through the milk ducts and into the lymph nodes under the arm.
- Scarring.
- The growth of a cyst inside the nipple.
- Problems with healing if the jewellery is too small.

Avoiding infection

A pierced nipple should heal in around six to 10 weeks. Some suggestions to care for your nipple in the meantime include:

- Keep piercings as dry as possible.
- Wash your hands before touching the piercing.
- Do not use your fingernails to move the jewellery.
- Do not share jewellery with friends.
- Don't touch or turn the jewellery unnecessarily during the healing process. If you do need to touch it always make sure your hands are clean.
- Do not remove the scab as this protects the piercing from infection.
- Use an antibacterial liquid soap on the piercing site when you're showering or bathing.
- Use a tissue or cotton bud to dry the piercing after a shower or bath. Do not use a towel or face washer.
- Do not use any alcohol-based cleaning solutions, tea tree oil, hydrogen peroxide, skin cleansers, antiseptic solutions or cream. These can dry out the skin and can sometimes result in prolonged healing times.
- Avoid swimming until the piercing has healed as water can pose a risk of infection.
- Keep jewellery in place, and the piercing intact, by covering it with sticking plaster, or where appropriate, wearing a bra when you're sleeping or exercising.
- Don't remove the jewellery before the wound has fully healed.

See your doctor

An infected nipple is treated with antibiotics. See your doctor immediately if you develop any of the following symptoms:

- Pain
- Swelling
- Inflammation
- Yellow pus.

Piercing should be avoided by some people

The risk of infection and complications mean that nipple piercing should be avoided in certain circumstances, including in combination with:

- **Some medications** - such as anticoagulant drugs, immunosuppressive medications and some corticosteroids.
- **Chemotherapy** - which reduces your immunity and makes you more susceptible to infection.
- **Breast implants** - particularly those implants located in front of the chest muscle, rather than behind.
- **Certain disorders** - including heart valve disease, rheumatic fever and skin infections.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- An experienced body piercer, registered with your local council
- Your local council
- Public Health, Department of Health Victoria Tel. 1300 650 172

Things to remember

- Choose an experienced piercer who works in a premise registered with your local council.
- Care for your nipple while the site heals includes regular bathing with anti-bacterial soap and only handling the piercing when necessary.
- If you experience any pain, swelling, inflammation or yellow pus, seek medical advice immediately.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Department of Health - Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit

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