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Aftercare Guidelines for Body Piercings

CLEANING SOLUTIONS:

Packaged sterile saline (with no additives, read the label) is a gentle choice for piercing aftercare. If sterile saline is not available in your region a sea salt solution mixture can be a viable alternative.

CLEANING INSTRUCTIONS FOR BODY PIERCINGS:

WASH your hands thoroughly prior to cleaning or touching your piercing for any reason.

SALINE rinse as needed while healing. For certain piercings it may be easier to apply using clean gauze saturated with saline solution. If your piercer suggests using soap, gently lather around the piercing and rinse as needed. Avoid using harsh soaps, or soaps with dyes or fragrances.

RINSE site as needed to remove cleaning solution residue. Moving or rotating jewelry is not necessary during cleaning or rinsing.

DRY by gently patting with clean, disposable paper products. Cloth towels can harbor bacteria and snag on jewelry causing injury.

WHAT IS NORMAL?

Initially some bleeding, localized swelling, tenderness, and/or bruising. During healing: some discoloration, itching, secretion of a whitish yellow fluid (not pus) that will form some crust on the jewelry. The tissue may tighten around the jewelry as it heals.

Once healed: the jewelry may not move freely in the piercing; do not force it. If you fail to include cleaning your piercing as part of your daily hygiene routine, normal but smelly bodily secretions may accumulate.

A piercing might seem healed before the healing process is complete. This is because tissue heals from the outside in, and although it feels fine, the interior remains fragile. Be patient, and keep cleaning throughout the entire initial healing period. Even healed piercings that you have had for years can shrink or close in minutes! This varies from person to person; if you like your piercing, keep jewelry in—do not leave the hole empty.

WHAT TO AVOID:

Avoid cleaning with alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, Dial® or other soaps containing triclosan,2 iodine, or any harsh products, as these can damage cells. Also avoid ointments as they prevent necessary air circulation. Avoid Bactine®, pierced ear care solutions, and other products containing Benzalkonium Chloride (BZK). These can be irritating and are not intended for long-term wound care. Avoid over-cleaning. This can delay your healing and irritate your piercing. Avoid undue trauma such as friction from clothing, excessive motion of the area, playing with the jewelry, and vigorous cleaning. These activities can cause the formation of unsightly and uncomfortable scar tissue, migration, prolonged healing, and other complications. Avoid all oral contact, rough play, and contact with others' bodily fluids on or near your piercing during healing. Avoid stress and recreational drug use, including excessive caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol. Avoid submerging the piercing in unhygienic bodies of water such as lakes, pools, hot tubs, etc. Or, protect your piercing using a waterproof wound-sealant bandage (such as 3M™ Nexcare™ Clean Seals or Tegaderm). These are available at most drugstores. Avoid all beauty and personal care products on or around the piercing including cosmetics, lotions, and sprays, etc. Don't hang charms or any object from your jewelry until the piercing is fully healed.

HINTS AND TIPS JEWELRY:

Unless there is a problem with the size, style, or material of the initial jewelry, leave it in the place for the entire healing period. See a qualified piercer to perform any jewelry change that becomes necessary during healing. Contact your piercer for a non-metallic jewelry alternative if your metal jewelry must be temporarily removed (such as for a medical procedure). Leave jewelry in at all times. Even healed piercings that you have had for years can shrink or close in minutes! If removed, reinsertion can be difficult or impossible. With clean hands or paper product, be sure to regularly check threaded ends on your jewelry for tightness ("rightytighty, lefty-loosey"). Should you decide you no longer want the piercing, simply remove the jewelry (or have a professional piercer remove it) and continue cleaning the piercing until the hole closes. In most cases only a small mark should remain. In the event an infection is suspected, quality jewelry or an inert alternative should be left in place to allow for drainage of the infection. If the jewelry is removed, the surface cells can close up, which can seal the infection inside the piercing channel and result in an abscess. Until an infection is cleared up, leave in quality jewelry or an appropriate substitute.

FOR PARTICULAR AREAS

NAVEL: A hard, vented eye patch (sold at pharmacies) can be applied under tight clothing (such as nylon stockings) or secured using a length of elastic bandage around the body (to avoid irritation from adhesive). This can protect the area from restrictive clothing, excess irritation, and impact during physical activities such as contact sports.

EAR/EAR CARTILAGE AND FACIAL: Use the t-shirt trick: Dress your pillow in a large, clean t-shirt and turn it nightly; one clean t-shirt provides four clean surfaces for sleeping. Maintain cleanliness of phones, headphones, eyeglasses, helmets, hats, and anything that contacts the pierced area. Use caution when styling your hair and advise your stylist of a new or healing piercing.

NIPPLE: The support of a tight cotton shirt or sports bra may provide protection and feel comfortable, especially for sleeping.

ORAL: Make sure to keep your mouth clean. Brush teeth and do a rinse (with saline or alcohol free mouthwash) after every meal or smoking.