



Aftercare for Body Piercings


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There is no single cleaning solution or aftercare regimen that works for everyone, everywhere, all the time. Different bodies and different lifestyles demand different aftercare. Geography matters, and what works for someone living in Philadelphia may not be the same thing that works for someone elsewhere. Differences in air and water quality, diet, and climate can greatly affect healing; what you use for aftercare and how you clean your piercing is only one part of a much larger picture.

You must find what works for you. The suggestions in this brochure are based upon our experience and the experiences of others who came before us. These are *suggestions*. If you are familiar with your body and how you heal, the most important thing you can do is pay attention—your body should tell you what to do.

Basic Piercing Care

New piercings should typically be cleaned twice daily. (Frequency also depends on your skin type, your daily activities and environment, and what piercing you are trying to heal.) You should continue this cleaning routine for the entire healing period. *Do not over-clean your piercing.* Cleaning too often with an overly harsh cleaning solution, or with too many different types of cleaning solutions, can irritate your piercing. If cleaning your piercing twice a day is suggested, don't assume cleaning it ten times a day is better: It isn't. You wouldn't wash your hands three times in a row with three different types of soap, would you?

Healing piercings discharge lymph, blood and blood plasma, and dead cells. The purpose in cleaning your piercing is to remove this discharge as well as any dirt or bacteria picked up during the day. The *products* you use on your piercing are not what make it heal—they only keep the piercing clean while your *body* works to heal it. Do not think of your cleaning solution as *medicine*, because it isn't. Salt water and/or saline solutions should be used to irrigate your piercing, but it is the action of flushing out the wound that helps healing, not the saline itself. Likewise, soap should just be treated like soap; lather around your piercing and then rinse thoroughly.

TO CLEAN YOUR PIERCING, USE ONE OF THESE METHODS

Warm Sea Salt Soaks

The single best thing you can do for your piercing is to keep a regular regimen of salt water soaks. These flush out the piercing, help to draw out discharge, stimulate blood circulation, and soothe irritations. We strongly suggest soaking your piercing at least twice a day—more often if healing is difficult.

Make a soaking solution by mixing sea salt and distilled water. Use pure sea salt (non-iodized) and not table salt, which contains extra chemicals that can irritate your piercing and dextrose (sugar) that can cause yeast infections. When buying salt, read the label: If it contains only sodium chloride (salt), or just salt and calcium (as an anti-caking agent—calcium phosphate or calcium silicate), it's good. Do not use Epsom salts, as this is a completely different chemical compound. Make sure your salt-to-water ratio is correct. A stronger or weaker solution is not better and may actually harm your piercing.

It's often easiest to mix it up by the gallon and keep it in the fridge. Cold soaks can be soothing for the first few days; after, heat as needed to make a warm salt-water soak.

Mix according to the table below (use measuring spoons and cups for accuracy).

To use: Make the water as warm as you can stand it without burning yourself. (You can heat it in the microwave.) Put the solution in a glass, press the glass against your skin to form a seal, and hold it over your piercing for five minutes or until the water cools. For piercings like nostrils, ears, nipples, and some male genital piercings the entire body part should be submerged in the solution.

SEA SALT	WATER
1/4 Teaspoon	1 Cup (8 oz.)
1 Teaspoon	1 Quart (32 oz.)
4 Teaspoons	1 Gallon

Sterile Saline Solution

Sterile saline solutions are a convenient, portable cleaning option. While rinsing with saline solution doesn't promote increased blood flow to the area the way that a warm soak does, it does provide a quick cleaning fix if you're at work, traveling, or someplace where soaking isn't an option. Popular brands include H2Ocean®, Steri-Wash, and Simply Saline® brand Wound Wash Saline®. (The saline products sold for contact lenses or ear and nasal irrigation sometimes contain additives that may not be suited to healing piercings. Instead, check the first aid aisle of your drugstore and look for saline specifically formulated for wound care.)

To use, liberally spray the solution, thoroughly cleansing the piercing. Your jewelry does not need to be rotated and sterile saline solution does not need to be rinsed off. (Do not simply dip cotton balls or swabs in a saline solution and apply it to the skin; you must irrigate the piercing to clean it effectively.)

Mild Liquid Soap

While sea salt soaks and/or saline rinses are the preferred aftercare for most piercings, soap effectively removes the residue of dirt, skin oils, cosmetics, cigarette smoke, and natural discharge that can sometimes remain after a salt water soak or saline rinse. While some piercers recommend antibacterial soap, it has not been proven more effective than other kinds of soap; it is the action of washing that is most effective in removing bacteria, not the soap itself. Use a natural, fragrance-free and dye-free soap. Stay away from harsh antibacterial soaps, especially those containing triclosan (like Dial®), as they can be very irritating and become less effective over time. Lastly, be sure to use a liquid soap, because bar soaps collect dirt and bacteria that can easily be reapplied to your piercing.

Before you wash your piercing, first wash your hands. (Never touch your piercing with dirty hands. This is the easiest way to get an infection.) Lather the soap in your hands—do not apply the soap directly to the piercing—and then lather the piercing and the surrounding area. Make sure to remove any discharge on the jewelry. After thoroughly cleaning the piercing and jewelry, rinse. (This is often easiest to do in the shower.) It is not necessary to rotate the jewelry during cleaning. If you find cleaning with soap is too harsh—if the skin around the piercing is becoming dry, red, or irritated—go back to salt water soaks and/or saline rinses.

DO NOT USE:

DO NOT USE Rubbing Alcohol or Hydrogen Peroxide

These are both too harsh for long-term use. Alcohol irritates and dries out your skin, and hydrogen peroxide destroys healthy skin surrounding the piercing and can actually slow healing. Commercial witch hazel solutions made with alcohol should also be avoided.

DO NOT USE Antibiotic Ointments

These include Neosporin®, bacitracin, or triple antibiotic ointments. These are not meant to be used for more than two weeks—making them ineffective for healing piercings. They also contain petroleum jelly, which keeps oxygen away from the piercing and creates the perfect warm, moist environment for bacteria to grow; this also keeps soap and other cleaning solutions from properly irrigating the piercing. Ointments are made for cuts and scrapes, not long-term healing.

DO NOT USE Bactine®, pierced ear care solutions, or other products containing benzalkonium chloride (BZK) or benzethonium chloride (BZT)

These can be irritating. Bactine® and similar products contain lidocaine, which can irritate your piercing even more. These products also have a very short shelf life once opened. If you have a leftover bottle of one of these in your medicine cabinet DO NOT USE IT. Throw it out.

DO NOT USE Betadine® (povidone-iodine) or Hibiclens®

These are far too harsh for daily cleaning. Hibiclens® can cause permanent damage if you get it in your eyes or ears. Betadine® will discolor gold jewelry.

Oral Piercing Care

Rinse Your Mouth

After you smoke, eat, or drink anything besides bottled water, rinse for 30 to 60 seconds with salt water. This will clean your mouth and piercing and soothe discomfort. It will also minimize the white discharge that normally forms around the jewelry and helps to eliminate the residue from smoking.

To mix a solution, use sea salt—not table salt—and use the same ratio in the chart under Basic Piercing Care. Use bottled water or distilled water, not tap water. (If you have high blood pressure, you may need to limit your use of salt water and use plain water instead. Ask your doctor.)

If you choose to use mouthwash instead of salt water, stay away from alcohol-based products like Listerine® and similar store brands. These are far too harsh, and repeated use can actually slow down healing. Instead, use a mild, alcohol-free mouth rinse. Just remember: It's the rinsing itself that is doing the work, not what you're rinsing your mouth with, so the gentler solution is the best choice for speedy healing. Using a mouthwash too often—or one that is too harsh—can easily do more harm than good.

Clean the Outside of Your Piercing

In addition to rinsing your mouth, you will also need to clean the outside of your lip, cheek, or beauty mark piercing. For this, follow the suggestions under Basic Piercing Care.

Expect Swelling

Oral piercings will usually swell for several days after they are first done, and some swelling may even be present for several weeks after that. **Suck on ice for the first few days.** Anti-inflammatories like ibuprofen (Advil® or Motrin®) may also help. Keep your head elevated the first week while sleeping (use extra pillows). Avoid anything that thins your blood, like alcohol or aspirin, or makes your heart rate go up, like caffeine or stimulants. Avoid drinking straws and water pipes.

Change Your Jewelry After Your Piercing is Healed

To allow for swelling, your initial ring or post will be larger or longer than the jewelry that will ultimately be worn. Once the swelling is gone and the piercing is healed, a shorter post or smaller diameter ring can be used. *Do not leave the original jewelry size in longer than the healing period.* Improperly sized jewelry is often the cause of irritated or damaged gums, chipped teeth, and other oral trauma. But be patient: Changing the jewelry too soon can result in more swelling and delayed healing. If you're not sure it's time, ask your piercer.

Keep Your Jewelry In

Oral piercings usually heal in about four to eight weeks. Jewelry can be changed after healing, but it should never be left out, even for short periods of time. Oral piercings close very quickly, making reinsertion of jewelry difficult—sometimes impossible.

Check Your Jewelry Occasionally

Make sure the ends on your jewelry are screwed on tightly. We make sure they are secure when you leave the shop; after that, it's up to you. For oral piercings, which may be difficult to grasp, try wearing disposable gloves to tighten jewelry.

Eat What You Want

While healing an oral piercing you are not restricted in what you *should* eat, but by what you *can* eat. Spicy-hot and temperature-hot foods may be uncomfortable, but cold foods can be soothing. Acidic drinks (like citrus fruit juices) may irritate fresh piercings. Eat what is comfortable for you.

Take it Easy on the Drinking

Excessive alcohol consumption during the initial healing period can be irritating and cause more swelling. Take it easy for the first few weeks.

Quit Smoking

This is the best thing you can do for your piercing—and yourself. At the very least, cut down on smoking during healing.

Avoid Wet Kissing and Unprotected Oral Sex During Healing

Remember: this is an open wound. Any fluid exchange should be considered unsafe sex. Even if you are in a monogamous relationship, your partner still has different natural bacteria than you do. You wouldn't have them lick your cuts, would you?

Keep Your Fingers Out of Your Mouth

The ends of pens and pencils, too. And buy a new, clean toothbrush.

Be Gentle

Avoid chewing gum during healing. Natural toothpastes or those meant for sensitive teeth may be less irritating during healing than the traditional kind. Avoid the urge to play with your piercing while it's healing—there will be plenty of time for that afterward.

Genital Piercing Care

Aftercare for genital piercings is the same as for most other piercings. These piercings are among the easiest and quickest to heal, so care is often minimal. Simply follow the instructions under Basic Piercing Care.

Take a Short Break from Sex

Sexual activity is not prohibited during the entire healing period, but a short break can help you heal faster. If you do have sex during this time (this includes masturbation), pay attention to any discomfort, practice fluid-safe sex, and be sure to clean your piercing immediately afterward.

Avoid Fluid Exchange

During healing, men should be sure to wear a condom (without spermicide) over new piercings during any sexual activity, even with monogamous partners. Women should consider similar protection (dental dams, etc.) to reduce the risk of infection. Unprotected oral sex should especially be avoided during the healing period, as this is one of the fastest ways to get an infection.

Try Emu Oil

Emu oil can be a helpful addition to aftercare and is especially useful for healing genital piercings. Simply rub a single drop onto the skin around the piercing with a clean finger. This helps with healing and also helps prevent crusty discharge from being forced through your piercing. Emu oil can be used in conjunction with saline soaks, though many see excellent results using it as their sole aftercare product.

WOMEN

Stick with Saline or Sea Salt Rinses

Soap can be too strong for women's genital piercings and can upset the natural balance of flora in the vagina, resulting in a yeast infection. Stick with sea salt soaks and/or saline rinses.

Don't Be Surprised by Bruising

While it doesn't happen to everyone, bruising is not uncommon. Also expect at least spotty bleeding for the first several days to a week.

MEN

Be Prepared for Bleeding

With Prince Alberts, reverse PAs, ampallangs, and apadravyas, don't be surprised to see a good amount of bleeding for the first one to three days; this is normal. Keep these piercings wrapped in gauze for the first several days, and put a rubber glove, condom, or female condom over the gauze wrap the first night.

Urinate After Cleaning

For piercings that go through the urethra (Prince Alberts, reverse PAs, ampallangs, or apadravyas), urinate after cleaning to rinse out any remaining soap or cleaning solution from the urethra.

Helpful Hints

Stay Healthy

The single best way to speed the healing of your new piercing is to take care of your *whole* body. Eat properly. Drink plenty of water. Get enough sleep. Manage your stress. Reduce smoking, drinking, and recreational drug use. The healthier you are, the healthier your piercing will be.

Keep Dirty Hands Off Your Piercing

Touching with dirty fingers is an easy way to get a piercing infected. Wash your hands before handling your healing piercing. Despite what you may have heard, you do not need to rotate or twist your jewelry during healing. Unless you are cleaning your piercing, keep your hands off!

Check Your Jewelry

Any jewelry with screw-on ends should be checked occasionally (with clean hands) to make sure those ends are screwed on tightly and are not in danger of coming loose.

Keep Your Jewelry In

While your piercing is healing, keep jewelry in it at all times. After your piercing is healed you can change your jewelry, but jewelry should never be left out for longer than the time it takes to insert a new piece. If you must remove your jewelry temporarily after healing, such as for work or surgery, there are less visible (and non-metal) alternatives that can be worn for short periods of time. Ask your piercer what your options are.

Cut Down on Smoking

Not just for oral piercings, but facial piercings as well. Besides being all-around unhealthy, smoke leaves residue on your piercing that can irritate it and slow healing. This means staying out of smoky environments as well.

Avoid Oral Contact

Mouths are full of bacteria and germs. Having someone's mouth on your piercing is one of the fastest routes to infection. Avoid wet kissing with fresh oral piercings, unprotected oral sex with healing genital or oral piercings, and tongues on nipples. Keep your lover's tongue out of your ear while you're healing a cartilage piercing. Limit the sharing of straws and forks too.

Avoid Other People's Body Fluids

A healing piercing is an open wound, so treat it accordingly. Even if you are in a monogamous relationship, you and your partner have different bacteria from each other. (You can end up sharing more than just the moment.)

Don't Let Your Clothing Constrict Your Piercing

If your clothing is contorting your piercing it's going to affect healing. With navel piercings, make sure the waistline of your clothing is low enough that it does not touch your piercing while standing or sitting. Be careful with large belts and the waistbands of tights. If bras are irritating your nipple piercings, try cotton tank tops or sports bras. Keep constrictive clothing off surface piercings and surface anchors as well.

Wear Natural Fibers

Natural fibers (cotton, silk, etc.) allow your piercing to breathe. Synthetic fibers do not, and this can slow down healing. Be especially conscious of bras and padding over nipple piercings and underwear over genital piercings.

Wear Clean Clothes

Keep any clothing touching a piercing clean. Make sure your sheets and bedding are fresh as well. Try using clean T-shirts as pillowcases for healing facial and ear piercings.

Keep Make-up and Hair Products Away from Healing Piercings

Be especially careful of hairspray and powdered foundation.

Clean Your Cell Phone

Or better yet, use the other ear. Also, wipe down eyeglass frames that come in contact with fresh piercings.

Change Your Sleeping Position

When healing cartilage piercings, sleep on your other side, if possible. Try to stay off your stomach with healing navel piercings as well.

Keep Pets Away from New Piercings

Pets are cute, but they shed. Cats walk in their litter boxes, and dogs lick more than just your face. Keep pets out of your bed during healing.

Be Mindful of Where You Swim

If possible, avoid swimming with a healing piercing. If you do decide to go in the water with a fresh piercing, be mindful about where you swim. (The clear ocean water of the Caribbean is not the same as the still water in your local swimming hole.) Public pools, lakes, and especially hot tubs should be avoided during healing. If you must swim, consider using a watertight covering such as Tegaderm™. At the very least, be sure to clean your piercing after you get out of the water.

Infections, Irritations, & Allergic Reactions

Infections

Infections come from exposure to bacteria and other contaminants and can typically be avoided with basic hygiene (and common sense). You will usually know if your piercing becomes infected if the surrounding tissue becomes red, painful, swollen and warm to the touch, or if you get discharge that is dark yellow, greenish, bloody, or has a bad odor. A small, fluid-filled "pimple" will often accompany facial piercing infections.

Healing piercings will normally secrete a white or pale yellow liquid during healing. This is not a sign of infection. A stinky white substance (sebum) from your oil glands can also collect on your piercings. This is normal too and comes off easily in cleaning. If your discharge is light in color and not accompanied by pain, itching, redness, warmth, or swelling, it is probably healthy.

If you do suspect an infection, *do not remove your jewelry*. Infections are more easily treated if there is still an opening for antiseptics to enter the wound and for discharge to exit. Without jewelry, the surface of the wound closes over and traps the infection inside, often causing a local surface infection to become a more generalized one. (Plus, you lose your piercing unnecessarily.) Hot salt water soaks are the best way to keep minor infections from getting worse. These help to draw out discharge, soothe the painful tissue, and stimulate your body's healing mechanisms.

Of course, in the event of a serious infection you should see your doctor. He or she can advise you on the best course of treatment. Just keep in mind that your doctor may not be familiar with treating body piercings.

Irritations

More often than not, what many people think of as an infection is actually the result of irritation. If your piercing is red, swollen right around the hole, peeling, excreting white or yellow fluid, bleeding slightly, or seems to have a solid (not fluid-filled) bump around the jewelry, it is probably irritated. These are all signs that the piercing is being subjected to excessive abuse or trauma.

Some common causes of irritation are touching or playing with your piercing, cleaning it too much, wearing overly restrictive clothing (navels and nipples), applying pressure during sleeping or phone use (ear cartilage), chewing gum, grinding teeth, or playing with the jewelry (tongue piercings), having sex too soon (genitals), or other actions or activities that bump, twist, pull at, or put undue pressure on your piercing.

If your piercing is irritated, figure out what's causing the problem. Once the cause of the irritation is found and eliminated, symptoms will often disappear. Warm salt water soaks work well to help soothe painful piercings and keep the irritation from getting worse.

Allergic Reactions

It is always possible for your body to react adversely to foreign substances introduced to it, including metals or cleaning solutions. Allergic reactions will often appear as rashes, excessive clear fluid discharge, redness, itchiness, or (with some metal allergies) the skin pulling away from the jewelry. These will show up immediately after being pierced—in the case of a metal allergy—or right after starting to use a new cleaning solution.

When using quality, implant-grade jewelry and appropriate cleaning solutions, allergic reactions are rare. If you suspect you are having an allergic reaction to your cleaning

solution (usually this will emerge as a large, red patch around the piercing), switch to a sea salt or saline solution. If you suspect a metal allergy, stop in and let us have a look. Often simple irritations are mistaken for allergic reactions.

Healing Times

Below are approximate healing times for healthy piercings on most people. Keep in mind that your piercing may heal more quickly or take even longer. Continue suggested aftercare for at least the amount of time listed below for your piercing.

At the end of the healing time, twice-daily cleaning is no longer required, although once-a-day cleaning is still suggested. When your piercing is healed, jewelry can safely be changed but it shouldn't be left out for longer than it takes to switch jewelry. Even once the hole becomes permanent it can still shrink and make jewelry reinsertion more difficult. If you like your piercing, keep jewelry in it.

Ear & Facial Piercings

Ear Lobes	6–8 weeks
Ear Cartilage	6 months–1 year
Eyebrow	6–8 weeks
Nostril	6 months–1 year
Septum	6–8 weeks
Bridge	8–10 weeks

Oral Piercings

Tongue	4 weeks
Lip/Labret	6–8 weeks
Beauty Mark	6–8 weeks
Philtrum	6–8 weeks
Cheek	6 months–1 year

Nipples & Navels

Male Nipples	4–6 months
Female Nipples	6 months–1 year
Navels	6 months–1 year

Male Genital Piercings

Prince Albert	6–8 weeks
Reverse PA	4–6 months
Frenum	6–8 weeks
Scrotum	6–8 weeks
Guiche	8–10 weeks
Dydoe	8–12 weeks
Foreskin	8–10 weeks
Ampallang/Apadravya	4–8 months
Pubic	1 year or longer

Female Genital Piercings

Inner Labia	4–6 weeks
Outer Labia	3–6 months
Clitoral Hood	4–6 weeks
Fourchette	6–8 weeks
Triangle	8–12 weeks
Christina	6–9 months
Clitoris	4–6 weeks
Princess Albertina	4–6 weeks

Surface Piercings 1 year or longer

Surface Anchors 2–6 months



We promise that you will leave our shop with a clean, beautiful piercing. What you do from here is up to you. You must be responsive to and responsible for your own body. If at any point you have any problems or questions, please feel free to stop in, give us a call, or send us an email. We are here to help.

The information contained in this guide is based on our experience as piercers and upon current industry standards. We are not doctors, and our suggestions, whether written or verbal, stated or implied, are not meant as a substitute for medical advice. In the event of a serious infection or other problem, consult your physician, keeping in mind he or she may be unfamiliar with issues related specifically to body piercing.



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