

While it is never inappropriate to contact the doctor or practice nurse, a visit to the piercer may sometimes be as beneficial. Do not remove the jewellery as this may aggravate the problem by closing off the drainage for the discharge matter. You must always consult the doctor regarding the use of oral antibiotics. You should consult the practice nurse at your GP Surgery if you are concerned about the wound.

You **must** consult your GP if you:

- a) experience a high temperature or feel unwell
- b) develop swollen or tender lymph nodes (glands), especially in the neck or groin, or under the arms.
- c) experience heat or redness spreading beyond the immediate area of the piercing/tattoo.

Common problems that can be avoided

- Over-cleaning, vigorous cleaning, or using a cleanser that is too strong can produce symptoms very similar to an infection. The skin may be very tender and appear shiny and there may be a clear discharge.
- Friction caused by tight or heavy clothing, rough sexual activity, or excessive movement of the area can cause dark redness, a hard growth of skin over the scar (keloids), discharge and rejection/migration.
- Stress, poor diet or illness can cause longer healing times or migration of the piercing.
- Occasionally, the selected jewellery may not be appropriate. This may or may not be due to circumstances that occurred after piercing. If the jewellery is too thin or too heavy, too large or too small in diameter, or not the appropriate style, healing problems may be experienced. The piercer should be contacted if a change in jewellery is required.

For further advice or information contact:
*The Community Infection Control Nurse at your
local Primary Care Trust (PCT)
or your local Health Protection Unit*

Information produced by: Health Protection Agency North West

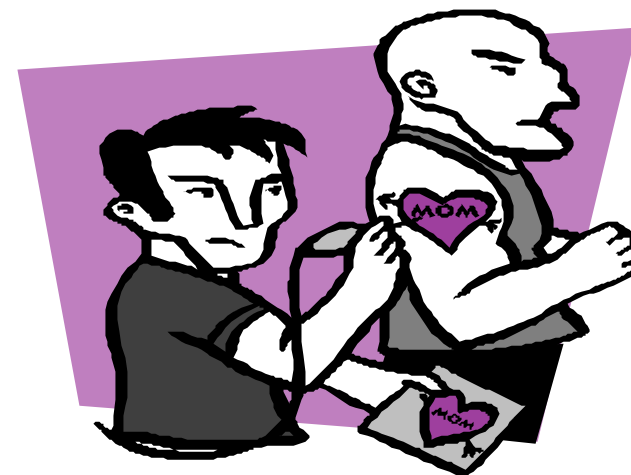
The Health Protection Agency is a new independent organisation dedicated to protecting people's health. It brings together the expertise formerly in a number of official organisations.

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HPA North West

Body art, skin piercing and tattoo *after care* advice



Website: <http://www.hpa-nw.org.uk/>

INFORMATION LEAFLET

The following aftercare guidance focuses upon skin piercing but is equally appropriate for other forms of body art and tattoos. Any piercing through the skin can potentially become swollen and infected if correct after care is not adhered to.

After having a piercing or tattoo your skin may:

- be tender, itchy, slightly red or bruised for a few weeks.
- bleed a little for the first few days.
- secrete whitish-yellow fluid (plasma) which crusts on the jewellery, this is not pus.
- tighten around the jewellery as it heals, making turning somewhat difficult.

Cleaning/Healing process. Piercings should be kept dry and clean as far as practicable, as the aim is to reduce risk of introducing infection.

It is therefore recommended that you:

- Do not touch the piercing for at least 48 hours
- Wash hands well before cleansing skin. Hands should be washed with soap and water, liquid soap is preferred, and dried thoroughly using a personal clean towel, or paper towel. When cleaning the piercing site, rotate the jewellery removing any crusts that fall off, but not scabs.
- Do not clean and turn the piercing more than twice a day. Cleaning more frequently may damage the delicate skin cells and cleaning less frequently may invite an infection. When cleaning is not in progress the piercing should be left alone, covered with a clean dry dressing during the healing period.
- With an oral piercing, after eating, smoking or putting anything in the mouth, rinse with antibacterial mouthwash at a dilution of 50%-75% to avoid damaging new skin cells. It is also necessary to disinfect the piercing twice a day for one month with a mild antiseptic mouthwash.
- For navel piercings, avoid wearing belts, tight trousers or restrictive clothing for about six months - one year.
- For genital piercings (male/female) you can use a clean pantyliner to absorb excess moisture and cushion the piercing. Avoid restrictive clothing. Any sexual contact should be undertaken with care and barrier protection should be used to protect the piercing from partners' body fluids.
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Changing and removing jewellery

Everyone heals at a different rate. The average healing times for piercing, provided they are cleaned twice daily and treated like new healing tissue, are shown below. It is important to remember that even after the initial healing period, the piercing will still need one full year or longer to completely heal.

Always treat the piercing with care and gentleness.

- Lip/ear	6 - 8 weeks
- Tongue	4 - 6 weeks
- Cheek	2 - 3 months
- Navel	6 months to 1 year
- Nipple	4 - 8 months
- Genital Piercing	4 - 8 weeks
- Nose	up to 6 months
- Eyebrow	2-4 months

The piercing will not be completely healed for several years. Jewellery should not be changed during the initial healing period (often at least 6 months). Clients should be advised to always wear the appropriate jewellery in the piercing, even when fully healed. The piercer should be contacted, for further advice, if removal of the jewellery is being considered on a temporary or permanent basis.

What to do in the case of infection

Infections are caused by contact with bacteria, fungi or other organisms (germs). Piercing infections can often be traced to one of the following activities:

- Touching the piercing or tattoo with unwashed hands
- Oral contact with the piercing, including your own saliva
- Contact with hair, cosmetics, oils, infrequently washed bedding or other agents
- Going into a pool, hot tub, lake, ocean or other body of water.

The following are indications of infection:

- Redness and swelling
- A sensation of heat at the piercing site
- Pain, especially throbbing or spreading pain
- Unusual discharge. It may be yellowish, greenish or greyish