Body Piercing

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER BEFORE GETTING YOUR BODY ART

Getting a tattoo or body piercing is a very important decision. You should make sure that this is something that you truly want and will not regret years later. While piercings may close up, they often leave permanent scars. Genital piercing can cause painful neuromas, neurofibromas, and neuralgia. Before getting any form of body art, make sure that you are emotionally and mentally stable. The following are some things that you might want to consider. If you answer no to any of these questions, then you may want to give yourself more time to think about your decision.

- Do you like the way body art looks and have no doubts about getting it?
- Do you want body art for personal reasons and not simply because of peer pressure or as a way of rebellion?
- Are you making your decision without the influence of alcohol or other drugs?
- Do you understand the procedures for body art and are you prepared for them? All piercings done in a piercing shop are done without anesthesia!
- Do you have an understanding of the risk of certain infections that go along with body art?
- Have you taken proper precautions to ensure your safety? Most states do not regulate these artists or businesses.
- Have you received a tetanus immunization in the last ten years?
- Do you have a history of heart disease and/or heart surgery? If so, any type of body piercing places you at higher risk of endocarditis, a serious heart infection.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR BODY PIERCING ARTIST

Anyone who is receiving a piercing has the right to ask about the artist’s training and experience. If the artist refuses or seems hesitant to answer your questions, it may be best for you to go somewhere else. Before you get a piercing you should ask the following questions to ensure your safety:

- What training does the artist have?
- What type of experience does the artist have?
- Does the artist belong to a professional organization or association?
- Is the artist knowledgeable about anatomy and physiology, CPR, prevention of blood-borne diseases, and has he or she attended seminars specifically relating to piercing?
- Does the artist have any samples of previous work, or references that can be contacted?
- Does the artist discuss and provide directions on how to take care of body art?

HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT STUDIO

In order to choose an appropriate studio, you should visit the facility and consider the following:

- Check to see if they have an autoclave. An autoclave is a heat sterilization machine regulated by the Food and Drug Administration. Also check to see if the studio runs regular spore testing in order to make sure that the autoclave is working properly. You may ask to see these records.
- Check to see if the studio reuses needles. Make sure that all needles are in individual packages that are opened while you are present. Make sure that all needles are placed in a sharps container after use.
- A piercing gun/instrument should not be used; it cannot be sterilized properly and its use increases the risk of damaging tissue.
- Look around the studio to make sure that it is clean, including floors and surfaces.
- The artist should use disposable gloves and change them each time he/she touches a non-sterile surface.
- Ask if the studio provides specific instructions for taking care of your body art.
- Ask to see where the piercing takes place.
- Ask how the studio provides privacy for clients getting a piercing in an area that they do not wish to have exposed.
- Check to see if they have posted Certification of Board of Health approval.

YOUR RIGHTS

Please remember that everyone who is receiving a piercing has the following rights. You have the right to:
• Be given service in a clean, open environment by a careful artist wearing a fresh pair of disposable gloves.
• Have a professional and knowledgeable artist who will make their client’s experience as pleasant as possible.
• Have a brand new, sterilized needle that will be placed in a sharps container immediately after it has been used for the procedure.
• Be fitted with jewelry that is safe and appropriate in size, material, design, and construction.
• Be fully informed about proper aftercare.

PIERCING AFTERCARE
If you develop fever, chills/shivering, shortness of breath, rash, or chest pain, seek care immediately.

Flesh piercing
• Avoid touching your piercing.
• Wash your hands prior to contact on or near piercing.
• Remove blood plasma with warm water and a Q-tip.
• Clean your piercing 3 – 5 times a day with warm water and a small amount of bacterial soap.
• Clean the inside of the piercing by rotating the jewelry a few times a day, but only rotate during cleaning process.
• Do not dry your piercing with a cloth towel. Instead use a disposable product such as a paper towel.
• Avoid swimming pools, lakes, and rivers for at least two weeks because they often contain bacteria that can lead to infection.
• Continue these instructions until the piercing is completely healed.

Oral piercing
• Avoid touching your piercing with unwashed hands.
• Rinse your mouth with antibacterial mouthwash after eating, drinking (anything other than water), and smoking or placing anything else in your mouth.
• Avoid oral sex, alcohol, and fruit juices until piercing is completely healed.
• Take ibuprofen and suck on ice cubes as needed.

TATTOO AFTERCARE
• Wash the tattoo with warm water and antibacterial soap after 3 or 4 hours and as often as you can for the rest of the day.
• At the end of the third day begin to moisturize the tattoo by lightly applying lotion to it. Ask your artist what kind of lotion he/she suggests to clients.
• Apply the lotion once a day for 2 – 3 weeks, or until the tattoo is completely healed.
• Avoid sun exposure and do not use tanning beds. Keep in mind that sunlight will fade a tattoo over time.
• Do not scratch or pick at scabs that form after a tattoo. This can increase the chance of infection, distort the art, and postpone the healing process.
• If you have any questions, call the artist.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?
Since tattooing and body piercing regulations are not always properly enforced, some artists do not follow simple health rules that are designed to prevent infection. As a result, there is always a risk of some type of infection when getting a tattoo. The following are some serious infections that are associated with tattooing and piercing.

• Allergic reactions to dyes used in tattoos and metals used in piercing.
• Hepatitis B
• Hepatitis C
• HIV
• Tetanus
• Tuberculosis
• Methicillin-resistant staph aureus (per CDC)
• Exposure to mercuric sulfide (also known as cinnabar), a red pigment (per CDC)
• Leprosy (per CDC)
• Endocartis
• Condom rupture from genital piercing
• E. coli infection from genital piercing
• Increased risk of STI’s due to tissue damage from genital piercing

SIGNS OF INFECTION
• Redness or excessive swelling in the area of the tattoo after the first 48 hours
• Throbbing pain or tenderness in the area of the tattoo after the first 48 hours
• Red streaks in the skin around the wound or progressing away from the tattoo
• Pus or watery discharge collected beneath the skin or draining from the tattoo
• Tender lumps or swelling in your armpit, groin or neck
• Foul odor from the area of the piercing
• Generalized chills/shivering, fever, rash, chest pain, or shortness of breath

If you notice any of these signs when examining your tattoo/piercing or have any concerns, see a doctor immediately.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact the following sources:

• The Alliance of Professional Tattooists (APT, Inc.) at www.safe-tattoos.com
• Local Public Health Department
• US Food and Drug Administration

References

