

## “Tongue Piercing”

What every Parent and Patient needs to know about “Tongue Piercing”  
Or my opinions after three decades of experience, practice, research, and teaching

Time to hold up on those “Tongue Piercings”, parents, patients, and kids.

Over the years we all have the opportunity to watch as various fads and crazes take hold and then, hopefully, run their course then play out. As parents, part of what we hope for is that the current fad will not leave any lasting and indelible marks. What looks good to some bearer’s of current fads is seen entirely differently by other observers, such as the current array of piercings observable at any public setting. I know that the kid who just walked by me looked in the mirror this morning at his eyebrow piercing and said to himself “boy, I really look COOL!”, while I’m left wondering just how blind that “\*” was that he could not see the obvious signs of chronic infection encircling the piercing.

If he woke up in the morning with the same symptoms encircling his fingernails, he would run screaming to his physician for help. As a scientist, I can’t help wonder how much damage the resulting C-reactive proteins are wreaking on his immune system, what factor it will play in leading to early onset of diabetes, heart disease, etc, and other musings that are probably entertaining only to other fellow scientists, musings that I doubt would have any significant impact on the population at large other than to make piercings more in demand.

What is even more amazing is that the vast majority of tongue piercings we see in our practice are also associated with obvious and lasting permanent damage to the teeth, and most patients are unaware of the damage they are inflicting on their teeth until we show the patient the self inflicted damaged teeth via video imaging. If they received the same damage in, say, a blow intentionally inflicted by another individual, they would call the cops first and their lawyer second.

As a parent, my duty is to set limits on self destructive behavior, and my suggestion to other parents is to do likewise. As a dentist, I point out to parents that tongue studs are very damaging to teeth, and should not be allowed. For my adult patients, I show them the damage and remind them that I make my living fixing damaged teeth. They have been informed, and it is their choice.

As a consumer, you also have certain rights. It is the duty of your dental professional to inform you of the potential damage, so you have been warned. Also, in my opinion, it is the duty of the person selling any goods to make sure a consumer has been properly informed of potential dangers associated with their product. (Perhaps some of the legal talent in the area would like to address this issue further in this forum.)

The following photograph shows the damage a patient did to her front teeth after intermittently wearing a tongue stud for less than nine months. Even though she had obviously notched out her four upper front teeth, she was not aware of the damage until we showed her the damage with the video camera. She had also typically chipped all of the corners of her front teeth. The damage is lasting and permanent. I can bond and reshape the edges, but the work will need to be re-done every few years.



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