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Aftercare Guidelines for Facial and Body Piercings

Cleaning Solutions: A mild liquid antimicrobial/germicidal medicated soap such as **Provon** or **Satin**, and water. Inferior alternatives include products such as Almay Clearly Natural, Hypocare, NutriBiotic; or other mild, fragrance- and color-free liquid antibacterial soap. These should possibly be diluted with distilled or bottled water, depending on product strength.

In addition, mild non-iodized (no iodine) **sea salt** soaks as described below.

Cleaning Instructions

Body piercings need to be cleaned **once or twice** daily, **every** day, for the **entire** initial healing time. Most people clean morning and/or night, in the shower. Do **not** clean with your liquid soap product more often than twice a day as this can irritate your piercing, and possibly delay your healing. For once-a-day cleanings, do it at the end of your day. Optimal frequency will depend on your skin sensitivity, activity level, and environmental factors.

1. Before cleanings wash hands thoroughly with liquid antibacterial soap and hot water. If you wish, you may wear disposable latex or vinyl gloves and/or also use a hand sanitizing gel. **Never, never** touch healing piercings with dirty hands. This is *vital* for avoiding infections.
 2. Prepare the area for the cleansing by rinsing or soaking with warm water and be sure to remove any stubborn crust using a cotton swab and warm water. Never pick with fingernails! This step is very important for your comfort.
 3. Apply a small handful of cleaning solution to the area with your **clean** hand. Cleanse the area and the jewelry, and gently rotate the jewelry back and forth a few times to work the solution to the inside of the piercing. (You do not need to rotate your jewelry during the *first several cleanings*).
 4. Allow the solution to cleanse there for a minute or so. You may bathe normally, just don't purposely work anything other than the cleanser onto the inside of the piercing.
 5. Rinse the area thoroughly under running water, while rotating the jewelry back and forth to completely remove cleanser residue from the inside and outside of the piercing.
 6. Gently pat dry with disposable paper products such as gauze or tissues, as cloth towels can harbor bacteria.
- Please try to be patient. Each body is unique, and healing times can vary considerably. If your piercing is tender or secreting you should continue the care regimen, even if it is past the stated average healing time range.

Salt Water Soaks

Mild sea salt water soaks are **strongly suggested** at least once a day to accelerate healing and increase your comfort. This may also help to reduce irritation in the area. Dissolve a pinch (1/4 teaspoon) of sea salt into one cup (8 oz.) of warm or hot water in a clean cup. Distilled water is optimal. A stronger solution is **not** better as you can burn your piercing with too much salt. Invert it over the area to form a vacuum and soak directly for a few minutes. For certain placements it is easier to use a clean cotton ball or gauze pad soaked in the salt water and applied to the pierced area. Follow with a clear water rinse or splash then pat dry with paper products. Do not rotate the ring with salt on it. Salt water is for the exterior of the piercing only.

Salt water soaks help to stimulate air and blood circulation which facilitates healing. You can do a brief salt water soak before your daily cleaning(s) as well as several additional times a day. It is particularly advisable to soak before you do anything active, as it will prevent crust from being pulled inside the piercing as you move around. Salt water is the **only** additional product (other than the cleanser and water) we suggest you use to care for your piercing.

One soak per day should be for at least a few minutes. Additional soaks can be brief (1 minute or so) and still be effective for soothing the area and removing matter.

What to do

- Wash your hands prior to contact on or near the area of your healing piercing!
- Leave the piercing alone except for when you are cleaning it. It is not necessary or advisable to rotate the ring while healing except during cleanings.
- Leave the starter jewelry in during the entire minimum initial healing time! (Assuming your initial jewelry is appropriate in terms of metal content, style, and size for the anatomy. Inappropriate jewelry should be changed out by a professional.) Those with captive-style rings or barbells (straight, bent, or circular) can change the bead/ball portion of the jewelry at any time.
- Check twice daily with clean hands to make sure the balls are screwed on tight on threaded jewelry such as barbells. Both balls tighten to the right.
- If you like your piercing leave jewelry in at all times. Even old, well-healed piercings can shrink or close in minutes after having been there for years! This varies from person to person, and even if your ear lobe piercings stay open without jewelry your body piercing may not! Contact your piercer if your jewelry must be temporarily removed (such as for a medical procedure). Monofilament nylon or another inert non-metallic substance may be able to be inserted to maintain the piercing until jewelry can be reinserted.
- Make sure your bedding is clean and changed frequently while you are healing, especially if pets get into your bed.
- Wear clean, comfortable, breathable fabric clothing in the area of a body piercing.
- A multi-vitamin mineral supplement containing zinc and vitamin C may help boost your body's healing abilities. Take it with your morning meal according to package instructions.
- Get enough sleep, eat a nutritious diet, avoid undue stress, recreational drugs, and heavy alcohol consumption. The healthier your lifestyle, the easier it will be for your piercing to heal.
- Showering is safer than taking a bath, as bath tubs tend to harbor bacteria. To bathe safely, clean your tub with a bleach product before each bath, and rinse the tub before you fill it. Also, be sure to do a running water rinse on your piercing when you are done in the tub.
- In the event that the piercing drains a thick pus discharge instead of the normal liquid secretion, you may wish to see a physician for evaluation and possible antibiotic treatment. If you do have an infection, the jewelry should be left in the piercing to allow for drainage of pus. If the jewelry is removed, the holes can close up, resulting in an abscess. **LEAVE YOUR JEWELRY IN !**

What to Avoid

- Don't use alcohol, peroxide, Betadine or Hibiclens or as they are overly strong and drying which can hinder healing.
- Don't apply any ointment such as Bacitracin, Neosporin or any triple antibiotic ointment on your piercing. These prevent oxygen from reaching the wound and form a sticky residue which can cause complications. They are not designed for use on healing piercings.
- Don't over clean. Cleaning more often than once or twice a day is NOT better. This can delay your healing and irritate your piercing.
- Don't use too many different products; select and use only one cleaning solution (such as Provon or Satin) plus sea salt.
- Avoid oral contact, rough play, and contact with others' bodily fluids on or near your piercing during healing.
- Don't use bandaids on a healing piercing. They limit air circulation and the adhesive can irritate the surrounding area.
- Avoiding sleeping directly on a piercing during healing is advisable.
- Don't hang charms or any object from your jewelry until the piercing is fully healed.
- Avoid submerging your piercings in water such as pools, lakes, jacuzzis, etc. unless you feel confident that the water is clean enough for you and an open wound (which is what your piercing is while it is healing). Most bodies of water harbor large amounts of bacteria. If there is sea life, motor oil or children in the water it is not clean enough!
- If you are going to be in water of questionable cleanliness use a breathable, non water-permeable wound sealant such as Tegaderm or Clean Seals (available at drugstores and pharmacies) before you go in, to protect yourself and prevent dirty water from getting inside your open wound. Cleaning afterwards is not likely to be effective in preventing infection.
- Exercise during healing is fine, just "listen" to your body. Try to avoid activities that put undue stress on the area. Your own sweat and bodily fluids are not harmful to your piercing, provided you clean daily as directed.

What is normal?

- Bleeding, bruising, discoloration and/or swelling is not uncommon. Any break in the skin, including a new piercing can bleed off and on for a few days, or swell, or bruise. These are not indications of any complication. Reduce intake of aspirin, alcohol, and caffeine. For above-the-neck piercings try sleeping with your head elevated above your heart (prop up on some pillows) to limit overnight swelling. A non-steroidal anti-inflammatory such as Ibuprophen (Advil, Motrin, etc.) can help minimize swelling and reduce discomfort.
- Some tenderness or discomfort in the area of a new piercing is not unusual. You may feel stinging, burning, aching or other unpleasant sensations off and on for several days or longer. During healing there may be some itching.
- Secretion of a fluid which contains blood plasma, lymph and dead cells is perfectly normal. It is fairly liquid, whitish-yellow in color and forms a crust on the jewelry at the openings of the piercing. This is not pus, but indicates a healing piercing.
- Once healed your piercing may secrete a semi-solid white malodorous substance from the oil glands called sebum. This is not pus, but indicates a healed piercing.
- Piercings may have a tendency to have a series of "ups and downs" during healing by seeming healed and then regressing. Try to be patient, and do keep cleaning during the entire initial healing time, even if the piercing seems healed sooner.
- Tightness is normal. Do not expect jewelry to swing freely in most body piercings, even after they are thoroughly healed.

Some extra hints and tips for particular areas:

Navel:

- Avoid tight, cinching belts and waistbands and inflexible clothing on the area during healing.
- A hard, vented eye patch (sold at pharmacies) can be applied under tight clothing (such as nylon stockings) or secured using a length of ace 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:

- Shield piercings from hair spray and avoid getting lotion, make up and other foreign substances in piercings.
- Make sure pillow cases are clean and changed frequently.
- Clean your telephone receiver inside and out with Lysol or other disinfectant. Avoid contact with your piercing to any public telephone.

Nipple:

- It is advisable to sleep in a cotton tank top or tee shirt especially if you have any pets that get on or in your bed. Many women find sleeping in a bra or sports bra to be comfortable with a healing nipple piercing.

Genital:

- Sexual activity is not prohibited, but must be gentle and hygienic. Listen to your body! If something feels sore, it means you need to ease up or stop for the time being. Use condoms and dental dams and for all sexual contact during healing to prevent sharing of bodily fluids. This is required even if you are in a monogamous relationship. It is mandatory for your health and safety during the entire minimum initial healing time.
- Pleasure Plus condoms have extra room for jewelry and seem to work well with genital piercings.
- Avoid condoms and lubricants containing Nonoxynol 9 as it is very strong and can irritate healing piercings. Use water-based lubricants such as KY Jelly.

Disclaimer

These guidelines are based on a combination of vast professional experience, common sense, research, and extensive clinical practice. This is not to be considered a substitute for medical advice from a doctor. Be aware, however, that many doctors have no specific training or experience regarding piercing and may not be educated on how to best assist you.