

Teen's tongue piercing causes 'suicide disease'  
Severely painful nerve disorder the latest on list of complications  
The Associated Press  
<http://www.paxilprogress.org/forums/showthread.php?t=22011>

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CHICAGO - The teenager said the stabbing pains in her face felt like electrical shocks that lasted 10 to 30 seconds and struck 20 to 30 times a day.

Her doctors diagnosed trigeminal neuralgia, a nerve disorder sometimes called "suicide disease" because of the excruciating and dispiriting pain it causes.

Doctors tried painkillers, then stronger medication, but in the end, a cure proved more simple: The young woman removed the metal stud from her pierced tongue.

Two days later her pain vanished.

The account in Wednesday's Journal of the American Medical Association is the latest documentation of complications, some life-threatening, linked to tongue piercing.

Other problems include tetanus, heart infections, brain abscess, chipped teeth and receding gums. One woman developed so much scar tissue that it resembled what she called a "second tongue."

In the newly reported case, the young Italian woman's mouth jewelry apparently irritated a nerve running along the jaw under her tongue. That nerve is connected to the trigeminal nerve, one of the largest in the head.

"There are people who have been dropped to their knees" by trigeminal neuralgia, said Alana Greca, a registered nurse and director of patient support for the Trigeminal Neuralgia Association. "That's how intense and how horrendous the pain can be."

The teenager is lucky her pain disappeared, Greca said.

"Certainly, this was an isolated case, an extremely rare complication of this kind of piercing," said Dr. Marcelo Galarza, a neurosurgeon at Villa Maria Cecilia Hospital in Ravenna, Italy, who reported the case to the journal.

The tongue is "a particularly dangerous place to pierce" because it is rich in blood vessels that can spread infection to major organs and because it is near important nerves and the upper airway, he said.

Jeanne Fritch, owner of Personal Art, a piercing and tattooing studio in Lake Station, Ind., said she has not heard of a similar case in her 21 years in business.

Fritch recommended people interested in tongue piercing see only professional, experienced piercers and use only "implant grade" metal jewelry. Good mouth

hygiene while the tongue heals also is important, Fritch said.

Stefania Fraccalvieri, the patient in the report, is now 21 and a student in Rome. Her advice to people considering tongue piercing: "Don't do that. My experience was so bad. I was so sick and now I feel much better."

## Primal Teen: Tattoos and Body Piercing

<http://life.familyeducation.com/teen/parenting/48432.html>

### Piercing and tattooing safety

You may have taken your daughter to get her ears pierced when she was still in elementary school—so now you're shocked that she wants extra holes? Or that your son wants some, too? Go figure. (You ought to be smarter than that.)

Tattoos and body piercing (nose rings, nipple jewelry, and belly button rings) are some of the latest forms of self-expression among teens. Because they can be dangerous, you may want to get involved.

Like any other serious discussion you'd like to have with your teen, it's important to know all you can about the issue.

Body piercing, if done safely, is not harmful. Unfortunately, the profession is unregulated in most areas, and many consumers are getting pierced under unsafe conditions (at a sloppy tent at a music festival, or in some rickety tattoo shack on the outskirts of town).

People who get tattoos and body piercings run the same kind of health risks as anyone sharing needles. While the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has never traced an AIDS case to a tattoo parlor, a very real danger is the risk of contracting hepatitis B or C. That's primarily because the HIV virus dies on a surface in 12 minutes, but the hepatitis virus can live for up to 10 days.

Currently, it's up to the consumer to select a piercer or tattoo artist who practices in a safe, hygienic manner.

### Danger Zone

A few facts about tattooing and piercing:

- Piercing guns are safe only on earlobes. They cannot be properly sterilized and when piercing other parts of the body there is a greater likelihood that the gun will become contaminated with blood.
- Holes in noses and near the top ridge of the ears are vulnerable to problems if the cartilage is pierced instead of the soft tissues.
- Body jewelry is a different size than ear jewelry, and smaller jewelry can become embedded in other areas of the body.
- Remind your teen that tattoos are permanent and can only be removed with expensive (and not always successful) laser surgery.

The Association of Professional Piercers is clamoring for state regulations that would outline proper sterilization. In the meantime, the organization recommends the following guidelines

- Get pierced or tattooed at a sanitary studio (rather than a booth at Lollapalooza).
- Piercers should not accept clients who are not sober. Many kids get tattoos when they are drunk, and alcohol in the system can lead to heavy bleeding.
- Piercers should use disposable or autoclaved instruments; sterile, disposable needles; and jewelry that has been disinfected and stored in sterile bags.
- New and sterilized needles should be used for each tattoo or piercing.
- Practitioners should wear clean latex gloves, dispose of the needles in puncture-proof containers after each use, and throw away tissues in plastic-lined containers.
- Tattoo artists should not dip into contaminated bottles of ink; they should use small, disposable containers of ink, and any ointments should be removed from containers with sterile spreaders.
- Belly-button piercing takes up to a year to heal and should be done only after great consideration. Teenage girls should be especially careful because the belly button is just a few inches from the fallopian tubes—it isn't a good place for infections.
- After-care is extremely important in any type of tattooing or piercing, so a true professional will offer very specific instructions. (Tattoos should be treated with an antibacterial cream and kept out of water and sunlight. Pierced areas should be washed at least twice a day with a surgical scrub/water solution.)

### **What's a Parent to Do?**

If you notice that your teen's friends are sporting tattooed biceps or bejeweled belly buttons, or if you think your teen is interested in piercing or in getting a tattoo, you might want to step in.

Begin by opening a conversation. You might comment: "How do you think John will feel about a scar by his eyebrow when he decides to quit wearing the ring?"

You may immediately learn that your teen thinks body piercing is "gross" or "dumb," in which case you can breathe a sigh of relief.

If you sense that your teen thinks it's an interesting idea, you might say that though you're not crazy about it, if he's going to do it you would like him to go to a trained professional. (Offer to cover the cost difference—it's *that* important.) Point out that a "scratcher" (inexperienced tattoo artist) can leave him with a blotchy mess as well as an infection; and a bad piercing can lead to infection or scarring.

Because tattoos and body piercing are often ways of rebelling, you may find that your offer dampens your teen's enthusiasm. If you offer to help pick out a tattoo, it makes getting one a lot less interesting. If you're lucky, you can relax knowing that the next "autoclaved instruments" your teen will see will be at the dentist's!

Because ideally you want to discourage tattoos and body-piercing totally, continue to

express your negative feelings about the process under consideration. You should only offer to help if it seems inevitable that your teen is going to take action with or without you. Then you'd like to see that it's done safely.

Professionals also note that multiple tattoos or body piercings are often a sign of some type of emotional problem or immaturity. If your teen has already become tattooed or pierced several times, you might want to take a deeper look at what's going on.

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