

Problem Solvers 26 Deviant Dentistry

Synonyms Tongue Piercing, tongue splitting, bifurcating tongues, tongue forking

People that want to express themselves, their beliefs or simply make a personal statement are often willing to adorn their mouths with piercings or creating alterations to their tongues. This article will examine mouth art and what the possible complications can be.

The American Dental Association does not endorse piercing or tongue splitting. Piercing can lead to gum problems such as recession or sores. It can lead to fractured teeth, pain, swelling and loss of restorations. Placing a device in the tongue can also lead to difficulty in chewing or swallowing and has the possibility of spreading diseases such as hepatitis.

- People that decide to pierce their tongues need to realize that body art studios are unregulated.
- It is imperative to make sure the business utilizes safe piercing guidelines. You need to make sure the studio uses autoclaves and ultrasonic cleaners to sterilize all instruments.
- Make sure the business is licensed and has clean, well-lit rooms.
- Make sure the person doing the piercing has new gloves and utilizes disposable needles for each procedure.
- The jewelry needs to be surgical stainless, titanium, gold or niobium.
- Make sure that post-operative care is carefully explained and if there are any complications seek medical attention immediately! Examples of problems are pus, bleeding, red streaks that radiate from the site, increased pain, tenderness or abnormal redness or inflammation.

Do they numb up the tongue before piercing it or splitting it?

Typically they do not get anesthetic for this procedure. When they perform a tongue splitting procedure, you will be offered anesthetic if it is done at an Oral or Plastic surgeon's office.

Is it safer to pierce the center of the tongue or pierce the sides?

Both sites risk damage to gums and teeth and pose risk for disease transmission and infection.

What about tongue splitting, is it safe?

Tongue splitting is a form of body art where the tongue is split into two sections to

resemble a snake's tongue. It is split centrally from its tip as far back as the underside base of the tongue. This procedure can be performed by oral maxillofacial or plastic surgeons. Some people perform this procedure on themselves. Safety relates to not just cleanliness of the environment but to the knowledge of anatomy so that vital nerves and blood vessels are not damaged while performing the procedure.

How is splitting done? Bifurcating your tongue can be performed by using a scalpel to section the tongue and suturing the sides of the tongue. It can be performed with a laser or electrosurgical device. It may require cauterizing as the tongue has many blood vessels and bleeding is a concern in this type of surgery. Some people elect to do this procedure on themselves with fishing line where it is put into a previous piercing and tightened over days or weeks to self-split the tongue without using stitches.

Creating a "forked" or split tongue has many risks associated with it. You can develop pain, swelling increased salivary flow and infection. The mouth has millions of bacteria and any of these bacteria can result in infection.

If people develop swelling or infection from the tongue piercing or splitting procedures they can have a severe reaction called Ludwig's angina, which is also called a cellulitis. This is a severe infection, which is a rapidly spreading and can invade spaces in the mouth that can lead to inability to breathe and even death. It is important to seek emergency care should any complication occur from these procedures.

Will this procedure affect my speech?

Yes at first you will have slurred speech and over time, usually around 2 weeks, you may get back to speaking more normally. Some people have reported a residual lisp when they speak.

Can my tongue grow back together after having it separated?

Yes that is why it is often sutured so the edges won't reattach as easily. Some people need to stretch the two halves to prevent them from growing back together again.

Can this procedure be reversed?

Yes since tongue tissue is not cut away during the splitting procedure, it can be simply refreshed and the two halves can be reattached.

Richard B. Winter D.D.S. M.A.G.D.D.I.C.O.I.
Master Academy of General Dentistry
Diplomate International Congress of Oral Implantologists

WWW.WINTERDENTAL.COM