



Rex F. Miller, DMD, PC

570 Blackstone Alley,
Jacksonville, OR 97530

Heavy Metal

No doubt about it, tongue piercing is risky business!

So, a week ago, 17-year-old “Chris” (his name has been changed to protect him from the snickering and the “I-told-you-so’s” of his friends and family) decided he could use some jewelry- only this time he’d wear it in his mouth.

Now his teeth ached and the entire left side of his mouth was swollen. Sitting in my office, he held his throbbing jaw with one hand. In his other hand, he held what looked like a tiny barbell. It was the jewelry that he had worn through his tongue before it became infected.

He thought he had taken precautions after he paid for the barbell to be inserted through a hole made in the middle of his tongue. He tried an antiseptic mouthwash in an attempt to control the millions of bacteria swimming around the injury site. However, when his tongue was pierced it created an open wound in a very large chunk of muscle that is the tongue and it became a bacterial breeding ground. In a few days a significant infection developed. The once sounding good idea now made his head feel like his tongue was now his heart.

Common symptoms following piercing include swelling, pain, infection, and an increased flow of saliva and injuries to gum tissue. If a blood vessel lies in the path of the piercing needle, severe and difficult-to-control bleeding could have resulted.

Likewise, “Chris” could have suffered nerve damage. Although “Chris” swallowed one end of the barbell, which had come loose at night under the pressure of his swollen tongue, he is thankful the piece did not lodge in his trachea. Other risks to oral piercing include chipped or cracked teeth, blood poisoning, or blood clots. Healing can take a month or more. Tremendous swelling of the tongue is common. Unlike an earlobe that is pierced, the tongue is in constant motion, which slows and complicates the healing process. A severely swollen tongue can actually close off the airway. Jewelry worn in the mouth can hinder your ability to eat not to mention your speech. It is hard to be cool when you cannot pronounce your words or when pieces of your lunch are tied in knots around that barbell.

Give your mouth a break – skip the mouth jewelry.

If you have requests or questions regarding a certain aspect of dental treatment, please contact me at my email address listed in this newsletter.