

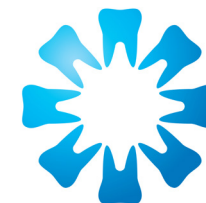


Ultimately, the decision to pierce, or not to pierce, is a personal one.

**We recommend that you consult your SADA dentist before making such an important decision.**

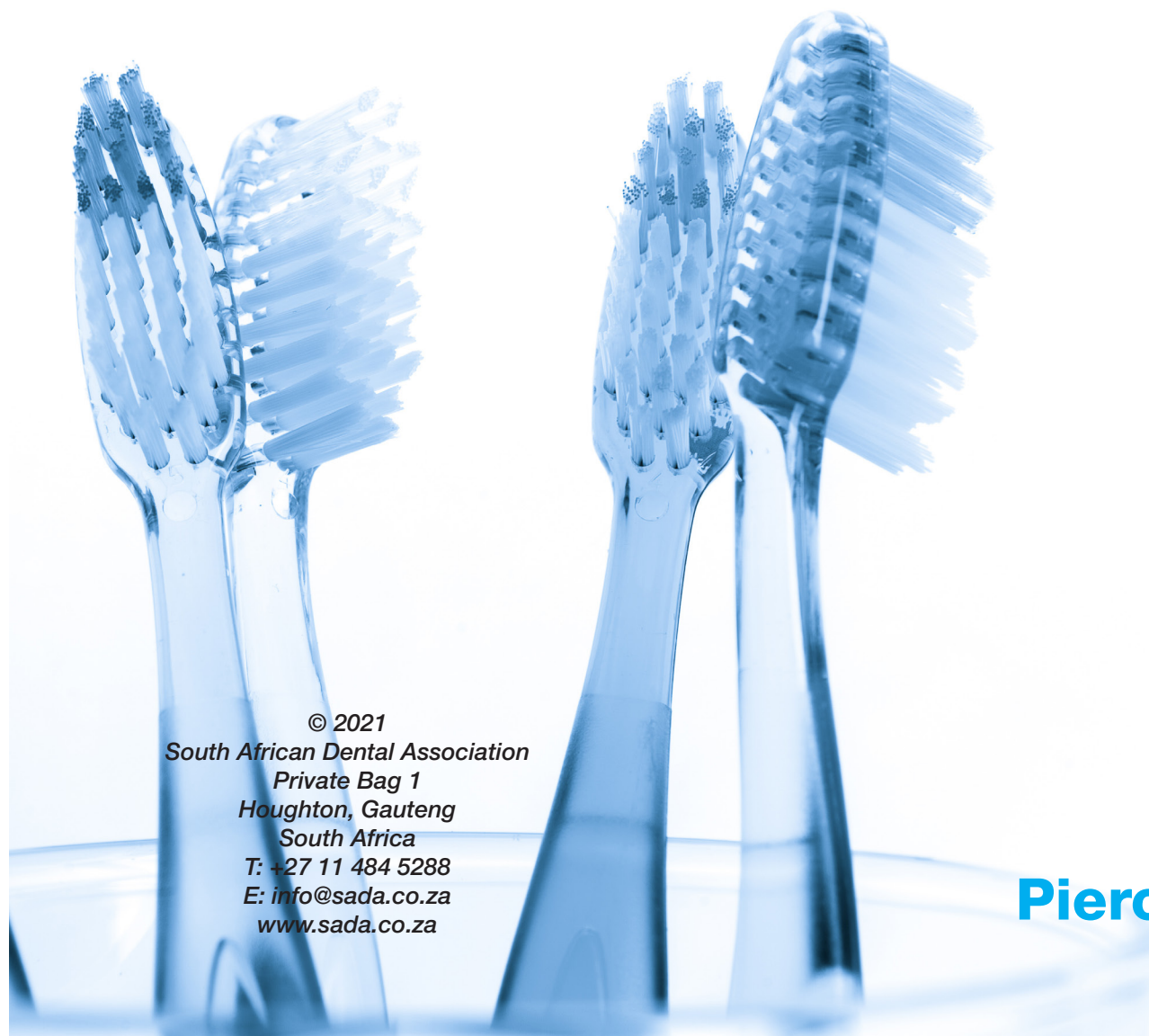
**When you make that decision, do it fully informed and committed to maintaining your oral health, including daily brushing and flossing and regular dental check-ups.**

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**Oral  
Piercings**

## What, exactly, is an oral piercing?

Oral piercings usually consist of a barbell through the tongue or labret (the space between the lower lip and chin). Other common oral piercing locations include the lips, uvula and cheeks. The jewellery comes in different styles, including labret studs, barbells and rings. They can be made of stainless steel, gold, titanium, plastic or nickel.



## Are there risks to getting an oral piercing?

Yes. Though most people consider piercing a low-risk choice, there are significant risks associated with oral piercings. When it comes to oral piercings, most dental professionals say no.

## What problems can oral piercings cause?

Common symptoms after oral piercing include pain, swelling and an increased flow of saliva. The mouth is full of bacteria and cannot be kept “clean” in the traditional sense. As a result, infection also occurs more readily after oral piercing, and, though not common, can include serious infections, such as hepatitis or endocarditis (inflammation of the tissue surrounding the heart).

In addition, piercers have no standardized training and may have limited knowledge of anatomy and physiology. If a blood vessel or nerve is in the path of the needle during the piercing, severe and difficult-to-control bleeding or nerve damage can result. For some, blood poisoning, metal allergies, or blood clots can occur.

Even after the initial healing process, there is the ongoing risk of serious damage to teeth and gum tissue posed by the mouth jewellery itself. Metal jewellery is often the culprit in cracked or broken teeth.

Plastic jewellery reduces this risk, though cannot eliminate it entirely. For piercings of the lips, the “backside” of the jewellery, attached inside the mouth, can be a source of irritation to the opposing tissue.

As the metal or plastic rests on the gum tissue, it can abrade and literally wear it away as it moves back and forth. This requires reconstructive surgery to repair and, in some instances, results in lost teeth.

This happens more commonly than people realize. Therefore, it is very important to regularly check the tissues in contact with the metal or plastic piercing to ensure one’s continued health. If the jewellery is causing damage or infection, it is essential to discover this early in the process.

For piercings through the tongue or lip, or below the tongue, there’s a risk of teeth chipping from the stud at the end of the device. Piercings through the floor of the mouth below the tongue or through the tongue have the highest risk of developing into a serious infection. These areas have a high blood supply and they’re located close to major structures such as the airway that can become obstructed as a result of infection.

There can also be damage to the gum tissue, particularly with certain labrets. The jewellery can cause gums to recede and leave the tooth root more vulnerable to decay and periodontal disease. Especially when you factor in other possible complications such as bad breath, drooling and problems with chewing and swallowing.

It is not unusual for the tongue to swell after being punctured, but in some cases it may swell so much that it can cut off breathing. In rare cases, doctors may pass a breathing tube through a patient’s nose until the swelling subsides.

Your mouth contains high levels of bacteria, and that bacteria can enter your bloodstream through the oral piercing, causing an infection in your heart or other life-threatening health problems.

Some people can have allergic reactions to certain materials used in piercings, which can lead to further complications. Make sure that the piercer uses the right kind of metal, such as surgical-grade stainless steel.

## What if I already have oral jewellery?

If you have an oral piercing, knowing the potential damage the jewellery may cause, you may want to consider removing it to protect your teeth and gums.

If you continue to wear oral jewellery, be sure when participating in sports that you remove the jewellery and wear a mouth guard.

Also, with clean hands, regularly check the tightness of your jewellery, as loose jewellery becomes a choking hazard and can damage the digestive tract if swallowed.

Disinfect your oral jewellery regularly and brush the jewellery the same as you would your teeth.

Visit your dentist regularly so that he or she can closely monitor the piercing and any potential damage to teeth and gums.

It is important to make an informed choice.