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## CLINICAL PRACTICE UPDATE

# Inquiring minds want to know . . . Body piercing and modifications: Suggested resources for emergency professionals

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**Summary** No matter where you work, you will likely be faced with a patient who has body modifications. Body modifications have been practiced by various cultures for thousands of years and are on the increase. Emergency professionals should have the necessary tools and training for emergency jewellery removal. This article provides emergency professionals with resources for caring for patients with body modifications.

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Whether you work in a rural emergency center or a metropolitan emergency department you will be faced, at one time or another, with a patient who requires your expert emergency care and has a body modification. Many emergency care providers have never heard of, or seen, a body modification.

Body modifications, whether they are piercings, tattooing, or other forms, have been practiced by cultures across the world for thousands of years. Several recent studies have demonstrated that these practices are unquestionably on

the rise, not just with teens, but people of all ages.<sup>1–3</sup> The recent ‘epidemic’ of body modifications means that emergency professionals will be caring for pierced patients, and therefore, should have the necessary tools and training for emergency jewellery removal. Ring expanding pliers are an essential item for every emergency department’s tool kit (see Fig. 1).

The *Journal of Emergency Nursing* published an article in 2006 which details the different types of body jewellery and suggested removal techniques.<sup>4</sup> The aim of this current article is to provide emergency professionals with additional resources surrounding the topical issue of body modifications. Table 1 provides a concise list of body piercing sites and information on related emergency procedures and whether, or not, removal is necessary, while Table 2 lists useful health care articles which provide further information on body piercings.

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**Table 1** Summary of body modifications

Type of modification	Where the jewellery is placed anatomically?	Approximate healing times	Common types of jewellery placed	Emergency care implications
Abdominal: navel	Usually above, but not through the umbilicus (bellybutton)	4–12 months	Barbell or ring	FAST emergency ultrasound examination can be performed without removal of jewellery
Cervical: madison (mid-neck)	Superior to the jugular notch (front of the neck) near the insertion of the sternocleidomastoid muscles	6–12 months	Surface barbell or Tygon	Removal required if surgical airway to be performed
Cervical: nape (back of neck)	Between the external occipital protuberance and the spinous process of the vertebrae (back of the neck)	6–12 months	Surface barbell	Cervical collar application can be attended without the removal of jewellery
Chest: nipple	Between the nipple and the areola (vertically or horizontally)	2–3 months	Barbell or ring	Cardiac defibrillation can be performed without removal of jewellery
Ear: ear (cartilage)	Commonly refers to the helix of the ear. Conch, daith, rook and tragus are all cartilage piercings	2–6 months	Barbell or ring	None
Ear: ear (conch)	The concha (shell of the ear) may be pierced in many different directions	2–6 months	Barbell, ring, plug, or eyelet	None
Ear: ear (head)	Juncture of the ear and head in the cartilage	2–3 months	Barbell or ring	None
Ear: ear (lobe)	Lobule (traditional) or transverse lobe piercing	4–8 weeks	Barbell or ring	None
Ear (rook)	Crura of antihelix, opposite of the crus of the helix—through the antihelix (“upper” ridge of cartilage in the ear)	2–3 months	Barbell or ring	None
Ear: ear (tragus)	Through the prominence of cartilage in front of the opening of the ear canal	2–3 months	Barbell or ring	None
Extremity: hand (web)	Self explanatory—between the fingers	6–9 months	Barbell or ring	None
Facial: earl (mid brow)	Below the glabella and above the nasal bone (middle of an eyebrow)	2–3 months	Barbell	Bag-mask ventilation can be performed without removal of jewellery
Facial: eyebrow	Through the soft tissue, behind the eyebrow ridge	6–8 weeks	Barbell or ring	Bag-mask ventilation can be performed without removal of jewellery
Facial: labret	Through the inferior part of the orbicularis oris muscle (below the lower lip and above the chin)	6–8 weeks	Disc back barbell or fishtail	Removal of jewellery is not required prior to emergency intubation if it is secure
Facial: lip (side)	Just above or below the tubercle of the lip (side of the lip)	6–8 weeks	Barbell or ring	Removal of jewellery is not required prior to emergency intubation if it is secure
Genital: ampallang	Horizontally through the glans (spongy head of the penis) & ± through the urethra	4–6 months	Barbell	Sometimes this is placed transurethral & may need to be removed prior to Foley catheter insertion

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