Nose piercing [1]

Dear Alice,

I am a first-year student and I want to get my nose pierced. This isn't just a whim; I've wanted one for a long time. However, I know that there will come a time when the ring will look juvenile on me. My question: will such a hole close up fairly quickly, without leaving an ugly scar?

— Holy, holy, holie

Answer

Dear Holy, holy, holie,

It sounds like you've given this piercing some thought, and your concerns of scarring are valid. While some nose piercings barely leave a trace after closing, it's possible for a scar to form due to factors such as genetics, poor aftercare, or infection. To help reduce the risk of scarring and prevent the need for your piercing to close, there are factors to keep in mind before, during, and after a nose piercing.

Prior to getting a nose piercing (let alone any piercing), it's good to think about factors or situations that would make this type of piercing inappropriate. For instance, does your place of work accept facial piercings? Perhaps you could get away with a small stud or a septum piercing that can be flipped into the nostrils to hide. Depending on your passion for this type of piercing, you might also consider whether that work place is a good fit if they don't allow for personal expression through body modifications. If your job isn't a factor, then there are myriad nasal piercings to consider, such as a bridge, nasallang, high nostril, or vertical nose tip piercing. Before jumping nose first into this decision, it's also recommended that you consider your immune function. If your body gets infections easily, you may need to be extra diligent with your aftercare.

If you decide to go through with the piercing, you'll likely find yourself in a tattoo or piercing parlor. For this type of piercing, the person doing the piercing will likely use a straight, sterilized 12- to 16- gauge hollow-bore needle rather than a “spring-loaded” gun, which is more often used for ear piercings. Using a piercing gun may actually cause additional trauma to the nose tissue resulting in a more difficult healing process. It can be helpful to know that local anesthesia isn’t
typically used... ouch! To minimize the chance of allergic reactions, using stainless steel jewelry intended for nose piercings, as opposed to other materials, is recommended.

As with any piercing, it's critical to adhere to the aftercare and healing instructions. Healing time depends on the type of piercing – it can range from six weeks to nine months, with a septum piercing taking the shortest and a vertical nose tip taking the longest time to heal. The recommendations on how to care for your piercing may vary; some piercers may recommend the use of saline solution, while others suggest using an antimicrobial soap. Typically, the parlor will give you their advice on the best aftercare regimen. That being said, you may experience some bleeding, swelling, and bruising after the piercing. You may also see some skin discoloration and a whitish-yellow crust on jewelry as well as experience minor itching. It’s also worth noting that tissue heals from the outside in. So, even if a piercing looks healed on the outside, it's good to be patient and continue cleaning throughout the entire healing period to ensure it fully heals. If you have any concerns about infection or the healing process, you may find it helpful to speak with a health care provider.

Finally, if you decide to take out the piercing for any reason, the amount of time it takes for the hole to close up and heal depends on the individual’s healing process. How quickly the hole closes or the likelihood of scarring might also depend on how often you move the jewelry or stretch the piercing. It’s possible there’s a faint scar or none at all, but it’s hard to say given that everyone heals differently. For more information on piercings and aftercare instructions check out the Association of Professional Piercers [2] website.

Holy holy holie, good luck deciding what to do!

Alice!

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