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[Home](#) > Is it possible to reopen a closed piercing?

Is it possible to reopen a closed piercing? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I have two piercings in each earlobe; however I have not worn earrings in the second set of holes for several years. Recently I tried to insert earrings into the seldom-used pierce holes. One earring went in with no problem, but the second did not go through after several attempts (I actually gave up because my last attempt bent the earring post). I have tried inserting other earrings but they also will not go all the way through. Is this something I can fix myself? Do I have to get the same hole professionally re-pierced? Will there be problems with scar tissue at the site?

Thanks!

Answer

Dear Reader,

The popular do-it-yourself (DIY) phenomenon is well applied in many circumstances, such as learning how to trim your split ends or hem a pair of jeans — however, when it comes to piercing, the risks are likely to outweigh the benefits. Attempting to pierce or re-pierce the skin outside of a professional piercing shop is considered dicey business. The absence of a sterile environment, proper equipment, and a professional piercer's training and experience may result in infection, nerve damage, and blood loss. Since you've tried several times to insert the earring in one of your ears with no luck, it's probably time to bring in a professional. In your case, the good news is that one of your earrings went through easily — perhaps you will get a 50 percent discount?

Survey data has shown that approximately half of at-home piercings result in the need for medical attention. If the piercing instrument isn't sterilized or placed properly, it may introduce bacteria, permanently damage nerves, or cause severe bleeding. Only trained professionals know exactly how to sterilize their instruments and avoid blood vessels and nerves to minimize pain and risk.

For other readers who have a similar problem, there are a few techniques you can use to determine whether you'll need professional assistance. Before attempting to push an earring into a possibly closed piercing, take a shower or bath to soften the skin with water. Lubricate the ear with some non-antibiotic ointment, to keep things malleable. Next, stretch the earlobe out to

maximize the size and reduce the thickness of the piercing hole. Experiment carefully with different angles and try getting the post through the hole from the back of the earlobe with gentle pressure. If the earring won't go through with a reasonable amount of force (measured by pain, or if the hole is so closed over that it causes your earring post to bend), odds are you'll need to contact a professional for re-piercing.

Whether you've succeeded at getting the earring post through or not, take proper care of the area to avoid infection. Clean the area with antibacterial soap and warm water, keep your hands away from the site, and avoid hair products and powder makeup as long as possible. If you experience any pain, swelling, or irritation that lasts longer than 48 hours, see your health care provider for treatment. Keep the jewelry in until you can see your health care provider so the piercing doesn't close and trap the infection under the skin.

If you're able to get your earring posts through without significant pain or duress, consider leaving them in for six to eight weeks (ideally, several months to a year) to make sure the piercings don't close again. This will give your epithelial cells a chance to heal around the circumference of the piercing hole. After that, try not to go more than a day or two without wearing earrings until the piercing is fully healed — usually about a year after regular earring use.

Alice!

Category:

[General Health](#) [2]

[Body Decoration](#) [3]

[Skin Conditions](#) [4]

Related questions

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[Gauged earrings](#) [7]

[Boyfriend pierced his penis](#) [8]

[Tattoo safety guidelines](#) [9]

Resources

[Medical Services \(Morningside\)](#) [10]

[Medical Services \(CUIMC\)](#) [11]

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Footer menu

▼ [Contact Alice!](#)

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Links

- [1] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/it-possible-reopen-closed-piercing>
- [2] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/general-health>
- [3] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/body-decoration>
- [4] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/skin-conditions>
- [5] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/pondering-pros-and-cons-tongue-piercing>
- [6] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/nickel-allergy-0>
- [7] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/gauged-earrings-0>
- [8] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/boyfriend-pierced-his-penis>
- [9] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/tattoo-safety-guidelines>
- [10] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/medical-services-morningside>
- [11] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/medical-services-cuimc>