



Painful Pleasures Piercing Glossary

Whether you're an experienced [piercer](#) or someone just beginning to explore the world of [body piercings](#) and other [body modifications](#), you're sure to learn something new by reading this piercing glossary. It's filled with common piercing terminology and definitions ranging from explanations of what different piercing tools are used for to piercing safety terms to types of body piercings, where they're placed and what types of body jewelry work best in them, and beyond. We've also included a few definitions related to [extreme body modifications](#) that some piercers perform, like [scarification](#), [branding](#) and [human suspension](#).

If you ever read a word in one of our [Information Center](#) articles or [piercing blog posts](#) that's unfamiliar to you, pop on over to this piercing glossary to expand your piercing knowledge by looking up a specific piercing phrase and its definition. Just [click a piercing term below](#) to see its definition or read straight through the [Basic Piercing Terminology](#) and [Types of Piercings](#) sections in this glossary for a fairly thorough education on piercing terminology. Definitions are sorted alphabetically to make it easy to find a specific term when you want to look up just one piercing definition. When definitions include other terms from this piercing glossary, you can click an unfamiliar phrase to jump to its definition, too. Other links within this glossary will take you to actual products so you can see the [body jewelry](#), [piercing tools](#) and other [piercing supplies](#) being referenced and shop for those items, as desired.

Note: Some definitions have "learn more" links following them. These links will take you to related [Shop Safety](#) and [Piercing Information Center](#) articles as well as [piercing blog posts](#) that will further enhance your piercing education.



Painful Pleasures Piercing Glossary

Links to Definitions of Piercing Terms

A Aftercare	Dermal Jewelry	N Nipple Piercings	S Scarification
Anesthetic	Dermal Piercings	Nose Piercings	Sharps Container
Anodization	Dermal Punch	Nose Ring	Single-Point Piercing
Antiseptic	Dermis	O Oral Piercings	Sterile Field
Autoclave	Disinfectant	P Piercing Artist/Piercer	Sterilization
B Ball Grabber Tool	E Ear Piercings	Piercing Caliper	Sterilization Pouches
Barbell	Epidermis	Piercing Forceps	Stretching
Belly Button Piercings	Extreme Body Modification	Piercing Gloves	Stretching Tape
BioPlastic	Eyebrow Piercings	Piercing Hemostat	Subdermal Implant
Body Jewelry	F Fistula	Piercing Needles	Surface Anchor Holder Tool
Body Modification	Frenulum	Piercing Pliers	Surface Piercings
Body Piercing	G Gauges	Piercing Retainer	Surgical Skin Marker
Body Piercing Wheel Gauge	Genital Piercings	Piercing Scars	Surgical Skin Prep
Branding	H Hypergranulation	Piercing Taper	T Tongue Piercings
C Captive Bead Ring	Human Suspension	Play Piercing Needle	Tongue Splitting/Bifurcation
Cartilage Piercings	L Labret Studs	Plugs & Tunnels	U Ultrasonic Cleaner
Cheek Piercings	Lip Piercings	Prince Albert Wand	W Web Piercings
Clean Room	M Microbiology	R Receiving Tube	
D Dermal Anchor Assistant Tool	Migration	Rejection	



Basic Piercing Terminology

- **Aftercare** - The process of caring for a healing [body piercing](#) to ensure that the [fistula](#) reinforces without piercing problems occurring, such as infection, [hypergranulation](#) and scarring. Piercing aftercare typically involves misting the piercing with a quality saline rinse like [Recovery Piercing Aftercare Spray](#) 3-6 times a day and soaking it for 5 minutes twice a day with [sea salt solution](#) during the healing process. Adding [tea tree oil](#) to your full soaks will give your healing piercing the benefit of its antiseptic and moisturizing properties. Sometimes an antiseptic piercing cleanser like [X-Pressions Antiseptic Piercing Aftercare Spray](#) or [antiseptic swabs](#) may also be needed once or twice a day for problematic piercings. ([Learn more about piercing aftercare.](#))
- **Anesthetic** - An over-the-counter numbing agent that typically includes 5% of lidocaine or less, which is the active ingredient that numbs the tissue being pierced. Some anesthetic products contain other numbing agents, but lidocaine is the most common one. Clients with low pain thresholds benefit greatly from a [topical anesthetic](#) being applied to the area to be pierced at least 15-20 minutes prior to being pierced.
- **Anodization** - The process of coloring titanium [body jewelry](#) via an electrolytic process. To anodize body jewelry, you need a collection of [anodizing equipment](#) that includes an anodizing machine, a mesh strainer, tweezers, and other accessories like you'll find in our [Anodizing Supply Replacement Kit](#). You can achieve different colors and color combinations using different settings on your anodizing machine, with or without a paint brush to aid in the process, as described in our [Titanium Anodizing Color Chart](#).
- **Antiseptic** - A product like rubbing [alcohol](#) or [iodine](#) that's typically used after an [antibacterial cleanser](#) has been applied to a person's skin and immediately before they're pierced to rid the skin of any microorganisms that could cause sepsis, which is an invasion of the body by harmful microorganisms like bacteria and viruses. ("Antiseptic" = anti-sepsis.) See the "[Surgical Skin Prep](#)" [definition](#) below for more information about the role of antiseptics in the piercing process.
- **Autoclave** - A machine that uses pressurized steam to sterilize body jewelry and piercing instruments, such as [piercing forceps](#). ([Learn more about how autoclaves sterilize piercing instruments using steam.](#))
- **Ball Grabber Tool** - A tool that holds a captive bead securely while you manipulate its coordinating [captive bead ring](#) with ring opening or closing pliers. [Ball grabbing tools](#) can come in very handy when you're working to insert or remove a captive bead ring from a piercing, and they can be used with other [body jewelry balls](#).
- **Barbell** - A type of [body jewelry](#) with either internally or externally threaded ends that screw onto either side of a shaft in one of several shapes. The primary styles available include: [bent barbells](#), which have a curved shape; [eyebrow rings](#) that are just micro bent barbells with matching or different ends; [belly button rings](#) that are most commonly bent barbells with two different sized and shaped ends; [straight barbells](#); [tongue barbells](#) (a.k.a. tongue rings) which are straight barbells with different sized and/or shaped ends; [nipple barbells](#), which are either



Painful Pleasures Piercing Glossary

straight or bent with or without dangling charms; [circular barbells](#) that are horseshoe shaped; [industrial barbells](#) that are extra long straight barbells for industrial piercings; and [surface barbells](#), which are inserted by a piercer under the skin, have visible removable [dermal tops](#) that appear to sit atop the surface of the skin, and that include both standard surface barbells and [Christina barbells](#), which are used exclusively for the female genital piercing known as a Venus or Christina piercing.

- **BioPlastic** - A hypoallergenic, autoclavable material also known as BioPlast that serves as the material composition for some types of body jewelry. [BioPlastic jewelry](#) is a flexible alternative to metal body jewelry that's better for people with sensitive skin and that's ideal for oral piercings and facial piercings with an oral side, because it's softer and gentler on the teeth and gums than metal body jewelry.
- **Body Jewelry** - Any type of jewelry worn in a body piercing. [Body jewelry](#) may be threadless, as with [captive rings](#), or threaded, as with [straight barbells](#) and [bent barbells](#) ranging from micro bent barbell [eyebrow rings](#) to curved [belly button rings](#). Threaded body jewelry comes in two styles: internal threading and external threading. Internally threaded body jewelry has threaded posts attached to its decorative ends that screw into matching threads inside the ends of a coordinating barbell shaft. With externally threaded body jewelry, the exposed threaded posts are on the ends of the jewelry shafts, and they screw into recessed threading on the coordinating balls or other decorative ends. [Threadless jewelry](#) encompasses any body jewelry that doesn't have parts that screw together to complete the jewelry, like pop fit labrets, BioPlast labret studs, standard post earrings, French hook earrings, captive bead rings, seamless rings, segment rings, plugs for stretched piercings, large gauge earrings (a.k.a. hangers), glass jewelry, piercing retainers held in place with O-rings, nose bones, nostril screws, and more. Body jewelry comes in different [gauges](#) (thicknesses) and lengths or diameters, which can be measured using [body jewelry wheel gauges](#) or [piercing calipers](#).
- **Body Modification** - The process of altering one's appearance. Although any physical change from hair dying to plastic surgery may be considered a form of body modification, the phrase is most often used in relation to [piercings](#), tattoos and more [extreme body modifications](#).
- **Body Piercing** - The process of placing holes in the body using [piercing needles](#), scalpels, [dermal punches](#), or other piercing tools for the purpose of inserting decorative [body jewelry](#) such as [captive bead rings](#) or various forms of barbells. Typically the phrase "body piercing" relates to all piercings other than earlobe piercings, but earlobe piercings are technically body piercings, too.
- **Body Piercing Wheel Gauge** - A tool that helps you measure [body jewelry](#). Painful Pleasures has developed a proprietary [wheel gauge](#) that allows piercers to ditch their old wire gauge measuring tools in favor of a simple wheel gauge that measures body jewelry ranging from 18g to 1" in size.
- **Branding** - The process of burning a permanent design into the skin using an [electrocautery pen](#). A [scratch pad](#) is a helpful tool for piercers who practice branding and dedicated branding artists, because you can attach it to your work surface via an adhesive back and use it to wipe burnt matter from the tip of the electrocautery pen as you work without having to constantly step



away.

- **Captive Bead Ring** - A ring-shaped style of [body jewelry](#) with a gap that holds a bead or other decorative object that can be removed to insert and remove the ring from a [body piercing](#). Captive rings also encompass seamless rings, which have a nearly invisible gap that can be widened or tightened to insert or remove the ring, segment rings, which have removable segments that make the rings look seamless when worn, and other ring styles as shown in our [Captive Bead Rings](#) section.
- **Clean Room** - This is typically a closed-off area within a tattoo and piercing shop where employees can clean and sterilize [piercing instruments](#) and other tools using products like [Sklar Kleen](#) and [bristled brushes](#) to hand wash piercing tools and an [autoclave](#) to sterilize instruments and body jewelry with pressurized steam.
- **Dermal Anchor Assistant Tool** - A unique tool designed by Painful Pleasures' sponsored piercer Jason Coale that looks a bit like an over-sized sewing needle with an eye that makes inserting dermal anchors easier than ever before. Check out the [Dermal Anchor Assistant Tool designed by Jason Coale](#) to see the product and a demonstration video that will show you why every professional piercer needs one of these dermal tools in their piercing toolbox.
- **Dermal Jewelry** - A type of body jewelry used for [single point piercings](#) that includes a dermal top attached to a dermal anchor that's placed semi-permanently into the [dermis](#). Dermal jewelry includes [skin anchors](#)/skin divers, which have permanently connected tops and bases, and standard dermal jewelry with [dermal tops](#) in a variety of shapes and styles that screw into [dermal anchors](#). ([Learn more about your dermal jewelry options.](#))
- **Dermal Punch** - A tool that creates a round hole in the body by removing a circle of flesh permanently, making them quite different from [piercing needles](#), which simply part the flesh to allow jewelry to pass through it. [Dermal punches](#) come in a range of sizes and may be used to create large gauge earlobe piercings instantly as an alternative to slowly stretching a smaller piercing to a larger gauge over time. They're also used for dermal piercings, conch piercings, and more. Clients should give cautious consideration to being pierced with a dermal punch instead of a piercing needle, because the flesh will be permanently removed and is likely to leave an ugly scar if the piercing is later retired. Punched cartilage may leave a permanent hole if something like a conch piercing is retired. ([Learn more about how dermal punches are used.](#))
- **Dermis** - The secondary layer of tissue beneath the surface of the skin, which is known as the [epidermis](#). Dermal anchors and surface barbells are placed in the dermis, and all [body piercings](#) puncture dermal tissue.
- **Disinfectant** - A chemical agent typically used on inanimate objects, like counter tops and [piercing tables](#), that either destroys or inhibits the growth of harmful microorganisms like bacteria, viruses and fungi. Examples of [disinfectant products](#) that piercers use include CaviCide1 and Madacide, both of which come in liquid and wipe forms to make it easier to keep piercing work spaces clean.



Painful Pleasures Piercing Glossary

- **Epidermis** - The top layer of skin that covers the dermis. All body piercings must pierce the epidermis at least once, and most piercings, like lip and earlobe piercings, actually pierce the epidermis twice--once upon entering the tissue and once as the piercing exits the tissue on the other side. Only [single-point piercings](#) puncture the epidermis once.
- **Extreme Body Modification** - The process of altering one's appearance in more extreme ways than just with tattoos and piercings. Some examples of extreme body modifications include [scarification](#), [branding](#), [sub-dermal implants](#), [tongue splitting](#), and tooth filing. Some of the most extreme modifiers alter their appearances to look like animals or elfin creatures with pointed ears, like the notorious [Stalking Cat](#) who had facial implants and tattoos that made him look like a tiger. ([Learn more about extreme body mods.](#))
- **Fistula** - The piercing hole created by a [piercing needle](#), [dermal punch](#), [scalpel](#), or other piercing instrument and held open with [body jewelry](#) until it heals enough to be a semi-permanent hole that will stay open even when body jewelry is removed for brief periods. Over time, fistulas (plural for "fistula") reinforce and thicken, which makes it easier for piercing clients to change their jewelry themselves.
- **Frenulum** - A piece of connective tissue that spans the gap between any two body parts, also referred to as "webs". The webs that connect your fingers and toes can be pierced, as can the tongue frenulum that connects the bottom of your tongue to the floor of your mouth, the upper lip frenulum that connects your inner upper lip and gums, and the lower lip frenulum that connects your inner lower lip and gums. The latter two piercings are [oral piercings](#) known as smiley piercings and frowney piercings, respectively. ([Learn more about web piercings.](#))
- **Gauge** - Refers to the diameter, or thickness, of both [piercing needles](#) and [body jewelry](#). The lower the number, the heavier the gauge. Fine [play piercing needles](#) may be as thin as 27g (g=gauge) or as thick as 20g. Traditional earlobe piercings are typically performed with 20g-18g needles, since those are the sizes of standard ear piercing jewelry like [French hook earrings](#). A tongue piercing requires a slightly heavier gauge, so 14g-12g is the most common size range for [tongue rings](#). When it comes to surface piercings like eyebrow and frenum piercings, the heavier the gauge, the less likely the inserted body jewelry is to [migrate](#) out from its original placement or be entirely [rejected](#) by the body, so some surface piercings are performed with 12g-8g needles. Gauge sizes go all the way up to 00g; beyond that, body jewelry for large stretched or punched piercings are measured in millimeters. ([Learn about common sizes for different types of piercings.](#))
- **Hypergranulation** - A piercing issue typically caused by a combination of pressure and excess moisture. If your new [body jewelry](#) is too tight due to severe swelling and/or in an area where you sweat a lot, you may develop a hypergranulation. It will present in one of two ways: either as the notorious red "piercing bump" alongside your [fistula](#) or as a ring of puffy red tissue around one or both ends of your fistula. Due to the way that hypergranulations are taut to the point of appearing fluid-filled and dark reddish-brown in color, many people make the mistake of thinking they're developing a [keloid scar](#) when they really have a hypergranulation issue. It's fairly easy to tell the difference, because hypergranulations will form closely around/by a fistula whereas keloids will continue to grow out of control well beyond a fistula. If you develop a hypergranulation, have your piercer change your jewelry to remove the pressure and ramp up



Painful Pleasures Piercing Glossary

your [aftercare](#) regime. Do three full [sea salt solution soaks](#) per day, add an [antiseptic rinse](#) to your routine once or twice a day, and continue misting your piercing with [piercing aftercare spray](#) 3-6 times per day. ([Learn more about dealing with piercing problems like hypergranulation issues in our piercing aftercare articles.](#))

- **Human Suspension** - The act of suspending a person from large gauge hooks carefully placed through temporary body piercings created immediately before the act of suspension. It's an ancient practice that's growing in popularity among piercing artists, piercing enthusiasts, and those looking for spiritual enlightenment through [body modification](#). To suspend a person requires a group of professional suspension artists working together with the right mix of [suspension supplies](#), like piercing needles, skin prep cleansers and antiseptics, Gilson hooks, traditional suspension hooks, suspension rigs, and more. ([Learn more about human suspension.](#))
- **Labret Stud** - A style of body jewelry with flat or slightly rounded backs, straight posts, and removable ends that are used for a variety of lip piercings and that can also be used in nostril piercings and different ear piercings. [Labret studs](#) come in several styles that include externally threaded posts and ends, internally threaded posts and ends, pop fit/push pin style labret jewelry with ends that pop into the shaft and stay in place after being bent slightly, PTFE labret studs with screw-on ends made of a more flexible hypoallergenic material, and BioPlast labret studs that are considered threadless jewelry, but both the posts and ends have ridges that help them stay together when the ends are snapped into place.
- **Microbiology** - The study of microscopically small organisms like viruses, bacteria, fungi, and molds. Microbiology is relevant to piercers because many microorganisms can harm piercing clients by causing infections and other piercing issues if [proper skin prep](#) isn't performed prior to a piercing or other body modification. ([Learn more about microbiology for piercers.](#))
- **Migration** - The process of [body jewelry](#) moving slowly away from a piercing's original placement. [Surface piercings](#) are most prone to migration, which is also sometimes referred to as the "cheese cutter effect" in relation to surface piercings because of the way layers of tissue are sloughed off, bringing jewelry closer to the surface of the skin over time.
- **Nose Ring** - A type of body jewelry worn in nostril piercings that may be ring-shaped but that more commonly comes in one of three primary styles: nose bones (straight with a bulbous end that holds the jewelry in place), nostril screws (straight with a curved end that holds the nose ring in place), or fishtail nose rings (straight jewelry with a decorative end that can be turned into a custom nostril screw by a piercer). [Captive rings](#) and [labret studs](#) can also be worn as nose rings in nostril piercings. Nose rings are most commonly between the sizes of 18g and 16g, although larger [gauges](#) of jewelry can also be worn in nostril piercings, as desired.
- **Piercing Artist** - Someone who specializes in the art of [body piercing](#), also known simply as a piercer. To become a professional piercer, you have to do a year-long piercing apprenticeship with an experienced piercing master who can provide you with a hands-on piercing education. All professional piercers should also be educated in [OSHA's Bloodborne Pathogen Standard](#). Depending on the state in which you operate, you may have to obtain a piercing license, too. ([Learn more by reading our Piercing Safely article.](#))



Painful Pleasures Piercing Glossary

- **Piercing Caliper** - A tool used for accurately measuring the thickness, or [gauge](#), of body jewelry, as well as the diameter of piercing rings. [Piercing calipers](#) come in digital and manual models.
- **Piercing Forceps** - An instrument for seizing hold of body jewelry that comes in many different shapes, styles and sizes. It's helpful to have a variety of [piercing forceps](#) on hand for inserting different types of jewelry and changing body jewelry, like mosquito forceps, dermal forceps, and so on.
- **Piercing Gloves** - Protective coverings for the hands that are typically made either of latex or nitrile. [Piercing gloves](#) protect clients from any [microorganisms](#) remaining on a piercer's hands after performing [proper hand hygiene](#), and they protect piercers from their clients' bodily fluids and other contaminants they may be exposed to during the piercing process. ([Learn more about why it's important to wear gloves when modifying.](#))
- **Piercing Hemostat** - A type of forceps used to insert or remove body jewelry with a more secure grasp than you could achieve with your bare hands, because [hemostats](#) lock in place once they're holding a piece of jewelry. There are many different types of hemostats, like those made specifically for working with dermal tops, mosquito forceps, and septum forceps used to guide a needle easily through the sweet spot in the septum.
- **Piercing Needle** - An instrument with a sharp, pointed/tapered tip used to create a piercing hole (fistula) that will hold whatever style of [body jewelry](#) is most appropriate for the piercing being performed. [Piercing needles](#) come in a variety of [gauges](#), lengths, shapes, and styles to give piercing artists the options they need to perform any body piercing, regardless of its location on the body. Unlike sewing needles, piercing needles are typically hollow so that jewelry can be placed in one end and threaded through a new piercing immediately behind the piercing needle, so that the jewelry is already in place by the time the piercing needle has passed through the skin being pierced. There are also [threaded piercing needles](#) available that allow piercers to screw a piece of threaded jewelry onto one end of the needle and pull it through the piercing behind the needle.
- **Piercing Pliers** - One of several different types of pliers used specifically to insert or remove jewelry from a body piercing or to alter jewelry. The different types of piercing pliers include [nose pliers](#) for creating custom nose rings out of fishtail nose rings, [ring opening pliers](#) for widening the gap on captive bead rings, and [ring closing pliers](#) for closing larger gauge captive bead rings that can't be easily tightened by hand after being inserted in a piercing.
- **Piercing Retainer** - A type of body jewelry used to keep a [fistula](#) open while minimizing the appearance of a piercing. People with facial piercings in particular often need to use [piercing retainers](#) while working in more conservative professional environments. They may also be used in lieu of metal jewelry to hold a piercing open during a medical procedure such as surgery, an MRI or a CAT scan. ([Learn more about piercing retainers.](#))
- **Piercing Scars** - An unsightly malformation of tissue around an existing piercing or over top of a healed [fistula](#). There are three primary types of piercing scars: atrophic scars, hypertrophic scars and keloid scars. Atrophic scars are recessed scars that are typically flesh tone; they create a divot in the skin where a retired piercing once was due to new tissue failing to completely fill the



Painful Pleasures Piercing Glossary

closed fistula. Hypertrophic scars also tend to be skin colored, but they're raised scars that form immediately around an existing piercing or over top of the space where a retired piercing was. Keloid scars are taut, reddish-brown scars that appear almost fluid-filled and that grow well beyond a piercing site. Very few people are prone to keloids, which tend to be a hereditary issue. If you know you're prone to keloids or anyone in your immediate family is, you should avoid getting pierced at all. ([Learn more about body piercing scars.](#))

- **Piercing Taper** - A straight tool that tapers down from a desired [gauge](#) to a finer point that allows a piercer or piercee to insert new body jewelry into a piercing more easily, particularly when inserting jewelry one size larger than the current jewelry, OR a stretching tool that can be pushed forward slightly at periodic intervals to enlarge a [fistula](#). When using a [piercing taper](#) to change jewelry, sometimes it helps to add a *tiny* drop of a water-based lubricant like Astroglide to the piercing site before inserting the taper, sliding it through your piercing, and pulling through your new jewelry.
- **Play Piercing Needle** - This is a fine gauge hypodermic needle with a plastic hub on the end that's used for needle play. Since each size [play piercing needle](#) has a different colored hub to indicate the needle's gauge, people who engage in needle play often use these needles to create colorful patterns and creative designs. Play piercing needles are also used for sexual stimulation. ([Learn more about needle play.](#))
- **Plugs & Tunnels** - Larger [gauge](#) body jewelry comprised of either a solid, typically circular plug or a version of a plug with a hollow center, known as a tunnel. [Plugs and tunnels](#) are most often worn in stretched earlobe piercings, but they may also be worn in other stretched or punched piercings such as enlarged labret piercings, conch piercings, and even the female genital piercings known as outer labia piercings. Plugs come in alternative shapes, too, such as [tear drop shaped plugs](#) and [heart shaped plugs](#). ([Learn more about stretching ear piercings; these tips can be applied to other piercings as well.](#))
- **Prince Albert Wand** - A type of body jewelry worn exclusively in healed male genital piercings known as Prince Albert or PA piercings. [PA wands](#) come in a variety of different styles with and without rings attached. Although some men wear Prince Albert wands on an ongoing basis, most men find they're better suited during intercourse and sexual play, and that [captive rings](#) or [barbell-style jewelry](#) like circular or bent barbells are more comfortable to wear regularly.
- **Receiving Tube** - This is a tool used in sensitive areas, to protect the tissue behind a body piercing from being damaged. For instance, [receiving tubes](#) are often used with vertical clitoral hood piercings (VCH piercings) to prevent the clitoris from being damaged during the piercing process. [Piercing corks](#) serve the same purpose and are sometimes a better fit depending on the type of piercing being performed, like when a piercer is doing an ear cartilage piercing and wants to protect the side of their client's head from getting poked. In that situation, a cork may fit the space between the back of the ear and the side of the head better than a receiving tube.
- **Rejection** - The process of the body rejecting, or forcing out, a [body piercing](#) over time, much the same way that it would push out a splinter embedded beneath the surface of the skin. Although any piercing can fail to heal properly and eventually have to be removed, true rejection is most common with [surface piercings](#), and it's the end result of a slower [migration](#) of



Painful Pleasures Piercing Glossary

body jewelry towards the surface of the skin.

- **Scarification** - The practice of etching permanent designs into the skin by tracing a pattern with a [scalpel](#) or by creating a free hand design with a scalpel blade. Sometimes [liquid skin adhesive](#) is used to fill the cuts and hold the skin open, creating more significant scarring that results in a more noticeable design once healed. Some piercers perform scarification in addition to traditional body piercings, but there are also dedicated scarification artists who practice this form of [extreme body modification](#). ([Learn more about scarification.](#))
- **Sharps Container** - A red plastic container into which used [piercing needles](#), [scalpel blades](#) and other sharp objects are placed to prevent piercers and their clients from inadvertently getting stabbed by objects contaminated with blood or other bodily fluids that may transmit disease. The Sharps Disposal by Mail System® allows tattoo and piercing shops to ship full [Sharps containers](#) to a facility where their contents can be properly and safely destroyed. ([Learn more about Sharps containers and the Sharps recovery system.](#))
- **Single-Point Piercing** - This is a [dermal piercing](#) that has an entry point but no exit point. To create a single-point piercing, a piercer will either use a [needle](#) or [dermal punch](#) to create a hole in the [epidermis](#), and then s/he will insert a [dermal anchor](#) into the [dermis](#) below. Over time, the sub-dermal tissue will grow around and/or up through the base of the dermal anchor, securing it in place. The depth at which the anchor is placed will determine the rise (height) of the post that extends to the surface of the skin. Once a dermal anchor is placed, a [dermal top](#) is then attached to the post so that the [dermal jewelry](#) appears to be laying immediately atop the surface of the skin. As an alternative to an anchor and removable top, a [skin anchor](#) (a.k.a. skin diver) with a base and permanently connected top may be inserted into a single-point piercing. ([Learn more about dermal piercings.](#))
- **Sterile Field** - A small area designated for holding sterile [piercing tools](#), [needles](#), [body jewelry](#), and [skin prep supplies](#) prior to and during the piercing process. Piercers will often use easily accessible [metal trays](#) or [tray stands](#) covered with clean [dental bibs](#) or [drape cloths](#) as the bases of their sterile fields. Clients should *not* touch anything within a piercer's sterile field, because they could contaminate the tools within that area. ([Learn more about setting up a sterile field.](#))
- **Sterilization** - In regard to piercing, this is a process that destroys microorganisms like bacteria and fungi, usually utilizing a high temperature sterilization method involving steam, dry heat or boiling liquid. Most piercers use [autoclaves](#) to sterilize body jewelry and piercing instruments, although cold sterilization methods involving products like [Wavicide](#) are sometimes used instead. ([Learn more about sterilization methods.](#))
- **Sterilization Pouches** - Special bags or lengths of nylon tubing into which tattoo and piercing instruments are placed before being put in an [autoclave steam sterilizer](#). Each bag or length of nylon tubing is sealed before being placed in an autoclave, but the composition of the pouches allows the objects inside to be fully sterilized despite being encased in bags. [Autoclave bags](#) allow batches of piercing instruments to be sterilized simultaneously, stored and kept sterile until they're needed for a piercing procedure.



Painful Pleasures Piercing Glossary

- **Stretching** - The process of increasing the size of a piercing either by replacing your current jewelry with jewelry one gauge larger or by using [stretching tape](#) to increase to the next size more gradually. Regularly massaging [emu oil](#) into the tissue around your piercing throughout the stretching process will increase your skin's elasticity and make it easier to stretch up to progressively larger [gauges](#). ([Learn more about stretching your earlobe piercings.](#))
- **Stretching Tape** - A product that sticks to itself that you can use to add a single layer to your body jewelry every week or two to slowly stretch your piercing to a larger [gauge](#). Using [stretching tape](#) tends to be much less traumatizing to a [fistula](#) than going up a full gauge at a time when stretching a piercing.
- **Sub-dermal Implant** - An object placed in the [dermis](#) under the surface of the skin for one of three purposes: to augment a body part/change the appearance of the surface of the skin as breast implants would enhance a woman's breasts, to insert a magnetic element, or to insert an anchor for body jewelry, as is done with dermal piercings, which are also known as [single-point piercings](#).
- **Surface Anchor Holder Tool** - A tool that holds dermal anchors and surface barbells securely in place while you change [dermal tops](#). The [surface anchor holder tool](#) is a must-have for anyone with a [dermal piercing](#) or [surface piercing](#) who wants to be able to change their dermal tops without dislodging the hardware beneath their skin, and it's a handy tool for piercers that serves as a great alternative to [dermal forceps](#).
- **Surface Piercing** - Unlike traditional piercings that pass straight through a body part, like earlobe and lip piercings, these double-ended piercings typically go through a pinched up portion of flesh with no natural entry or exit points. Surface piercings can be created by pushing a hollow needle followed by a [surface bar](#) through pinched flesh nearly anywhere on the body, or they may be made with a scalpel by cutting a line the length of the surface bar being inserted, placing the bar in the cut, and letting the tissue fuse back together over top of the surface barbell. Some examples of surface piercings include eyebrow piercings, nape piercings, frenum piercings (a type of [male genital piercing](#)), and Christina piercings (a type of [female genital piercing](#)). ([Learn more about surface piercings.](#))
- **Surgical Skin Marker** - A sterile marker that a piercer uses to create temporary marks on a client's body to indicate where a piercing will be placed. They're also called piercing markers, surgical skin pens, and tattoo pens, among other things. [Surgical skin markers](#) allow clients to confirm that they like the placement for a piercing they're getting, and they serve as a guide for the piercer performing the piercing.
- **Surgical Skin Prep** - The process of cleaning a piercing client's skin with an antibacterial cleanser followed by an antiseptic product to remove harmful microorganisms that may otherwise be pushed beneath the surface of the skin during the piercing process. Lack of proper skin prep may contribute to higher risk of a client developing an infection or other piercing problem. ([Learn more about body modification skin prep.](#))
- **Tongue Splitting** - The process of bifurcating the tongue (dividing it in half) as far back as where the underside of the tongue connects to the floor of the mouth so that the two muscles on



Painful Pleasures Piercing Glossary

either side of the tongue can work independently of each other. Tongue splitting may be done slowly by threading fishing line through an existing tongue piercing, tying it off around the tip of the tongue, and progressively tightening the line as it cuts through the tongue over time. Alternatively, the process can be done with a [scalpel or electrocautery pen](#), either all in one sitting or in small increments over time. Since this process is not a medical procedure, only an over-the-counter anesthetic can be used to numb the tongue slightly, so the less aggressive tie-off method is likely to be less painful. ([Learn more about tongue splitting.](#))

- **Ultrasonic Cleaner** - A machine that removes contaminants from tattoo and piercing tools and other objects in a tank filled with liquid that's rapidly moved by inaudible, high frequency sound waves that act like brushes on the tank's contents. [Ultrasonic cleaners](#) loosen any debris clinging to piercing instruments and clean them thoroughly, making it safe to then run the instruments through an [autoclave](#) sterilization cycle. ([Learn more about ultrasonic cleaners.](#))

Types of Piercings

The types of [body piercings](#) listed below are the most basic names for various types of body piercings. For instance, "lip piercing" may refer to one of multiple different body piercing placements that go through the skin immediately above the upper lip or below the lower lip. This list is intended just as a starting point for exploring the many different types of body piercings from which you can choose and to give you basic guidance about the best styles of [body jewelry](#) worn in each type of piercing. To learn more about specific piercings within one of the general categories below, click the "learn more" links that follow each type of piercing listed.

- **Belly Button Piercings** - A piercing placed through one edge of the rim of the navel, also known as navel piercings or simply as belly piercings. Belly button piercings are most commonly placed through the tissue above the navel so that the belly button ring inserted hangs over top of the belly button itself. Alternate placements may be done from the left and right sides of the navel, beneath the navel, or from any other point around the rim of the navel cavity. Typically, standard [belly button rings](#) are comprised of a bent barbell and two different sized and/or shaped ends, but captive rings and other styles of belly rings are also available. ([Learn more about belly button piercings.](#))
- **Cartilage Piercings** - A piercing placed through any part of the cartilage of the ear. Cartilage piercings include helix piercings, industrial piercings, rook piercings, daith piercings, tragus piercings, and other types of cartilage piercings. These piercings accommodate a variety of different styles of body jewelry, but [labret studs](#) tend to make the best starter jewelry for any cartilage piercing. Other styles of [cartilage piercing jewelry](#) include industrial barbells, captive rings, single- or multi-loop helix rings, short straight barbells with decorative cuffs attached, ear cuffs that don't require any piercing at all to be worn, and more. ([Learn more about cartilage piercings.](#))
- **Cheek Piercings** - Facial piercings with an oral side typically placed in opposing pairs through the cheeks to either highlight existing dimples or create the appearance of one having dimples, which is why cheek piercings are also known as dimple piercings. The most common type of jewelry for dimple piercings are labret-style [cheek piercing barbells](#) with extra long posts. Cheek piercings are a higher risk type of piercing that should only be performed by experienced



Painful Pleasures Piercing Glossary

[professional piercers](#). When done improperly, one or both parotid ducts may be permanently damaged, possibly causing saliva to constantly flow down the outside of the cheek(s) or leading to recurring infections. This is just a warning and shouldn't deter you from getting cheek piercings if you really want them; just make sure you find a reputable piercing artist who has successfully performed dimple piercings before to pierce your cheeks. ([Learn more about cheek piercings.](#))

- **Dermal Piercings** - A [single-point piercing](#) that goes through the [epidermis](#) and embeds a [dermal anchor](#) into the [dermis](#) beneath. A decorative [dermal top](#) is then screwed into the dermal anchor so that the jewelry appears to be sitting atop the surface of the skin. As an alternate to the more typical two part type of [dermal jewelry](#), skin anchors (a.k.a. [skin divers](#)) may be inserted. These are single pieces of dermal jewelry that have permanently connected bases and tops. Over time, tissue grows up around and/or through a dermal anchor (depending on if it has a solid base or one with holes in it) to secure the anchor in place and make it possible to change the decorative dermal tops without dislodging the anchor beneath the surface of the skin. A [dermal anchor holder tool](#) is helpful to those who choose two piece dermal jewelry and want to change their decorative tops periodically. ([Learn more about dermal piercings.](#))
- **Ear Piercings** - A piercing placed through the earlobe or any part of the ear cartilage. Earlobe piercings are the most common types of ear piercings, but there are many other options available, most of which are [cartilage piercings](#). Some people [stretch their earlobes](#) to larger gauges so they can wear [plugs](#), [hangers \(a.k.a. large gauge earrings\)](#) and other styles of heavier gauge [body jewelry](#), but standard earlobe piercings accommodate post or French hook style [earrings](#) in the 20g-18g size range (g=[gauge](#)). ([Learn more about ear piercings and the many types from which you can choose.](#))
- **Eyebrow Piercings** - A [surface piercing](#) placed through the tissue around the eyebrow. Miniature/micro bent [barbells](#) are typically worn as [eyebrow rings](#), but actual rings (typically [captive rings](#)) may also be used as eyebrow piercing jewelry. ([Learn more about eyebrow piercings.](#))
- **Genital Piercings** - Any body piercing placed in the male or female genital region, either through the pubic area, the actual genitalia, the anus, or the tissue in between the anus and genitals (known as the perineum on men). There are many different types of male and female genital piercings from which you can choose. The type of [body jewelry](#) you wear in a genital piercing is largely determined by the type of genital piercing you get. For instance, [micro bent barbells](#) are the ideal choice for body jewelry worn in the popular female genital piercing known as a VCH piercing (short for vertical clitoral hood piercing), and [straight barbells](#) are one of the most common styles of jewelry worn in the male genital piercing known as a frenum piercing. Some male and female genital piercings can be stretched to accommodate tunnels in addition to more standard styles of genital piercing jewelry like [captive rings](#). ([Learn more about male genital piercings.](#) | [Learn more about female genital piercings.](#))
- **Lip Piercings** - A piercing placed horizontally through the tissue above the upper lip or below the lower lip, or vertically through the actual lower lip. There are many different placement options for lip piercings, such as labret piercings, which are placed through the skin below the center of the lower lip, and Monroe piercings, which are placed through the left or right side of the skin



Painful Pleasures Piercing Glossary

above the upper lip to mimic a mole (hence the name, since Marilyn Monroe had an upper lip mole, as do Madonna and Cindy Crawford, whose names are used as alternate names for this type of lip piercing). Lip piercings performed in pairs or sets of four are known as "bites", and there are several pairings of bite piercings from which you can choose. The most common style of jewelry worn in lip piercings is [labret jewelry](#), but [captive rings](#) and [straight barbells](#) are also used for select types of lip piercings. In particular, [BioPlast labret studs](#) tend to make the best lip rings, because they're made of soft, flexible [BioPlastic](#) that's less likely to cause gum recession or to chip a tooth. ([Learn more about lip piercings.](#))

- **Nipple Piercings** - A piercing of the nipple which may be placed vertically or horizontally through the nipple, or at any other angle desired, although horizontal nipple piercings are most common. A person may have one or both nipples pierced, as desired, but more people have them done in pairs rather than as one-off piercings. The best styles of starter jewelry for nipple piercings include straight and bent [barbells](#), because they put the least amount of downward pressure on healing fistulas. [Captive rings](#) and other styles of [nipple piercing jewelry](#) may be worn once your nipple piercings are fully healed. ([Learn more about nipple piercings.](#) | [Learn about breast feeding with nipple piercings specifically.](#))
- **Nose Piercings** - Any piercing placed through part of the nose, including nostril piercings, high nostril piercings, septum piercings, bridge piercings, rhino piercings, and nasallang piercings. Nostril piercings are the most popular type of nose piercing, with septum piercings coming in at a close second. The two types of piercings require fairly different styles of jewelry. [Nose rings](#) typically refer to nostril rings in the nose bone, nostril screw or fishtail styles. [Labret studs](#) and [captive rings](#) may also be worn in nostril piercings. Bent or circular [barbells](#) or captive rings are best suited for septum piercings, although septum tusks and other styles of large gauge [septum jewelry](#) may be worn in stretched septum piercings. Straight barbells are most common for both rhino and nasallang piercings. ([Learn more about nose piercings.](#))
- **Oral Piercings** - Any piercing of the oral cavity, including tongue piercings that go straight through the center of the tongue (usually more towards the back-center of the tongue), and web piercings, including tongue web piercings (piercing of the [frenulum](#) that connects the bottom of the tongue to the floor of the mouth), smiley piercings (piercing of the frenulum that connects the upper lip to the gums), and frowney piercings (piercing of the frenulum that connects the lower lip to the lower gums). [Tongue rings](#) are the most common type of body jewelry worn in tongue piercings; they're just straight [barbells](#) that typically have two different sized and/or shaped ends. [Micro bent barbells](#) make the best starter jewelry for oral web piercings, but fine gauge [captive rings](#) may also be worn in them. ([Learn more about tongue piercings.](#) | [Learn more about oral web piercings.](#))
- **Surface Piercings** - A type of piercing that goes beneath the surface of the skin, through the [dermis](#), and that has no natural entry or exit points the way that lip and [ear piercings](#) do. (Read the alternate [definition of surface piercings](#) as compared to [single point piercings](#) in our [Basic Piercing Terminology](#) section above.) Without natural entry and exit points, surface piercings are more prone to [migration](#) and [rejection](#) than other body piercings. Many different types of piercings are technically surface piercings by nature, including eyebrow piercings and even belly button piercings to a degree. However, classically speaking, surface piercings refer to double-ended piercings placed below the surface of the skin at points such as the nape of the neck, the



Painful Pleasures Piercing Glossary

hips, or in the case of Christina piercings, through the female pubis vertically above the clitoris. For standard surface piercings, a special type of jewelry known as a [surface barbell](#) is used. A surface barbell has two posts connected by a flat or round bar that runs beneath the surface of the skin, so that the only part of the jewelry that's visible are the two [dermal tops](#) screwed into the posts on either end. This gives surface piercings the appearance of sitting atop the surface of the skin when in reality the main part of the jewelry is beneath the skin, embedded in the dermis. ([Learn more about surface piercings.](#))

- **Tongue Piercings** - A piercing of the tongue, typically placed roughly 1/3 of the way back from the tip of the tongue, so that the bottom ball of the [tongue ring](#) inserted sits in front of the tongue [frenulum](#). A tongue "ring" is actually a straight barbell with a smaller bottom ball and a larger top ball or other decorative top that's sufficiently large enough to prevent the jewelry from sliding through the [fistula](#). There are other much less common tongue piercing placement options, including forward tongue piercings and horizontal piercings through the tip of the tongue. You can also get multiple traditional tongue piercings, which are known as venom piercings when placed as a pair of piercings side-by-side through the right and left halves of the tongue. The only time anything other than a straight barbell can be used for a tongue piercing is with tongue tip/forward tongue piercings, which can accommodate a [captive ring](#) or [circular barbell](#) that's horseshoe shaped. ([Learn more about tongue piercings.](#))
- **Web Piercings** - A piercing of any [frenulum](#), including the webbing between the fingers and toes, the tongue frenulum, and the upper and lower lip webs that connect the inner lips to the gums. Web piercings are technically [surface piercings](#) in nature, which means that they tend to be more prone to [migration](#) and [rejection](#) than other body piercings. When it comes to web piercings placed on the hands and feet, [labret studs](#) make ideal body jewelry. The flatter bottom side of the jewelry is less likely to get in the way when using your hands or feel uncomfortable when wearing shoes than something like a straight [barbell](#) with balls on both ends. As for oral web piercings, [micro bent barbells](#) are ideal starter jewelry, and [captive rings](#) may be worn in well-healed oral web piercings. ([Learn more about web piercings.](#))