Ear piercing is a tradition in many cultures and it has experienced many changes. The purpose of this article is not to discuss the reasons, if it's good or bad or if you should do it or not, but to comment on some frequent questions from the parents in my clinic. Therefore, the focus will be mainly on babies and children, but most of the information here is also valid for adults.

What are the risks of ear piercing?

- **Infection:** this is the biggest risk. Anytime the skin is broken there is a risk of infection, since germs can penetrate easily to the surrounding tissues and the bloodstream. This is why it is important to use a sterile technique and single-use sterile studs, to eliminate cross-contamination.
- **Pain:** the procedure causes minimal pain, similar or less than a vaccination. The actual piercing happens in an instant. For a few moments after the piercing, the earlobe feels warm and flushed. Topical anesthesia is not recommended because it's not necessary. However, in some cases, and if preferred by the parents or the patients, it can be used, under the supervision of a pediatrician.
- **Bleeding:** if the procedure is done using the latest-generation bloodless techniques, with a medical piercing "gun" like the one in the picture (which is actually the one we use in our clinic), this risk is reduced almost to zero (and the cases in which bleeding does occur are usually associated with post-piercing errors in manipulation of the studs by the patient or the caregivers).

What are the contraindications of ear piercing?

Contraindications for ear piercing normally involve the patient having a condition which means they might be prone to infection or slow to heal from any potential infections, a physical injury, or some kind of obstruction. If a patient is suffering from any of the following then they should seek medical advice before they pierce their ears. The following are general absolute or specific contraindications, not specific to the pediatric age:

- Circulation disorders
- High or low blood pressure
- History of thrombosis / embolism
- Epilepsy (epileptics must be accompanied by someone if you are to pierce their ears)
- Pregnancy
- Diabetes
- Dysfunctions of the nervous system
- Skin disorders
- Bruises or recent haemorrhage or swelling
- Scar tissue or keloids
- Warts or moles (you may pierce through freckles)
- Cuts, abrasions or recent operations

**If in doubt, do not pierce and discuss with a physician!**

What types of earrings are recommended?

- Medical ear studs are the only ones recommended for piercing.
- They are made from hypoallergenic material, meaning they do not cause allergies or irritations.
- They are available in many different styles and sizes such as gold, 24ct gold plate, silver plate and titanium.
- All studs are supplied in validated presterilized blister packs using ‘Ethylene Oxide’ Gas and Gas permeating paper.
- Every pair or earrings, therefore, has been individually sterilized.
- They are compliant with EC Nickel Directive 94/27/EC.
- Medical grade earrings are skin friendly and should not embed into skin.
Information for parents

Can you bring your own earrings?
In order to reduce the risk of infection and nickel allergy, it is advisable to use only medically sterile earrings or studs. These should be kept for 6 weeks (12 for cartilage). After this time, they can be replaced with your preferred earrings.

What is the best age to pierce the ears?
There is no medical evidence to support any age restrictions. Pain is felt at all ages, even by a newborn, although the younger the baby, the less noticeable are the signs of pain by untrained eyes, giving the impression that it hurts less. At an older age, anxiety and fear become more important in the distress felt before, during and after the procedure. Due to the fact that piercing the skin means breaking the intact skin barrier and the subsequent risk of infection, it is better to wait until 3 months of age to decrease the risk of a minor infection to generalize and have serious consequences. Also, in newborns, the earlobe is very tiny and this makes it more difficult to pierce correctly and symmetrically.

What area of the ear can be pierced with these earrings?
- The lobe is the soft area of the ear and consists of skin covering connective fatty tissue. It is the area of the ear which can be pierced. The healing period is 4-6 weeks.
- The cartilage area is a type of elastic tissue covered by skin and fine hair. The area which can be pierced is the flat upper part of the cartilage area indicated by the diagram below. Due to the nature of the cartilage, it is very important to know that though piercing this part of the ear can be safely done with this system, extra care must be taken in caring for this type of piercing. The healing period is at least 12 weeks. This type of piercing is not recommended for children. The most important risk associated with piercing this area is an infection of the cartilage called chondritis or perichondritis, which can be severe.

The Caflon Blu Ear Piercing System is not specifically designed to pierce any other part of the body and should only be used to pierce the shaded areas of the ear indicated in this diagram.

Anatomy of the outer ear

Anatomy of the ear: the safe areas to pierce.
Information for parents

**Ear piercing**

### What are the measures to be followed after the piercing?
If the piercing is done professionally, then potential problems will be minimized. However, the importance of aftercare cannot be overemphasized.

#### To prevent infection:
- Do not fiddle with the ears, avoid any unnecessary handling of the ears and studs.
- Do not replace studs with other earrings during the initial 6 week period (12 weeks for cartilage).
- Wash hands before touching the stud or ear and cleanse the pierced area twice a day without removing the earrings by lightly applying alcohol solution to the front and back of the pierced area.
- Do not allow soap or shampoo to build up behind the stud or clasp. Rinse well with water and apply alcohol after bathing.
- Between cleanings, keep the pierced area DRY.
- Cover the ears when spraying perfume, antiperspirant, hairspray.
- Do not push the butterfly clasp along the post toward the ear. The butterfly clasp should always be positioned at the end of the post.
- Minor pain/redness may occur immediately - this is normal. This should settle within 48 hours, provided proper after care is done.
- If undue pain/swelling occurs, consult with a physician immediately, but don't remove the studs until you have consulted your doctor.

#### To prevent piercings from closing:
- Do not take studs out for at least 4 – 6 weeks (12 weeks for cartilage).

#### If infection or irritation occurs:
- Should excessive redness, irritability, itching or soreness occur consult your doctor immediately. Do not remove the studs until you have consulted your doctor.

### Is swimming allowed after ear piercing?
- Chlorine and the bacteria in unchlorinated waters may irritate the newly pierced ears. It is therefore recommended that you wait 2-3 weeks after your piercing.

### General points
- After 4 – 6 weeks the stud can be removed from the ear lobe (12 weeks for cartilage) and another post type earring should be worn.
- The post should be 24 ct Gold Plated or Stainless Steel and this type should be worn for at least another 2 months following the healing period.
- No wire type earrings should be worn during this period.
- The wearing of heavy earring at any time may cause the piercing hole to stretch leaving a slit effect to the piercings.
- During the first year of piercing the patient should avoid going longer than 24 hours without wearing earrings. This will ensure that the piercings will not close.

### Where should you get your ears or your child's ears pierced?
It's common sense that your home, a jewelry shop, a tattoo studio or even a pharmacy are not the best places to do this. Only a nurse or a physician can guarantee ear piercing done in a safe, hygienic and professional way, since they are trained in pain management, aseptic measures and complications prevention and management. This is especially important for young babies and children.