

RESTING (ESPECIALLY FOR EARLOBES)

This is the practice of regularly removing large-size jewelry (approximately 2 gauge (6mm) and thicker) for a certain interval to help keep the piercing healthy. Such a break relieves the tissue of the jewelry's weight and pressure, and increases circulation - particularly at the bottom of the piercing, which supports most of the burden. This should be done only after your piercing has recovered to the point where you can comfortably remove the jewelry for at least a few minutes at a time. Experiment to determine the amount of time your jewelry can be removed without the hole shrinking too much. Generally, the longer you have worn a particular size, the easier this becomes. Check with your piercer to see if resting is advisable in your case.

MASSAGE & MOISTURIZING

Massage helps to break down scar tissue and stimulates circulation to promote healthy, vital skin. Natural oils such as jojoba, coconut, etc. may be used to moisturize and prevent dryness, which can result in brittleness, weakness, and tears. For a few minutes (during your rest period, if you have one) massage the tissue thoroughly with your chosen oil.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Soreness, redness, weeping, or inflammation of your tissue may indicate a problem. You may have stretched too far, too quickly, or you may be having a negative reaction to the material, size, or style of your jewelry. Treat an overstretched piercing like a brand-new one and follow appropriate care and cleaning. Failure to do so can result in serious consequences, including infection and tissue loss.

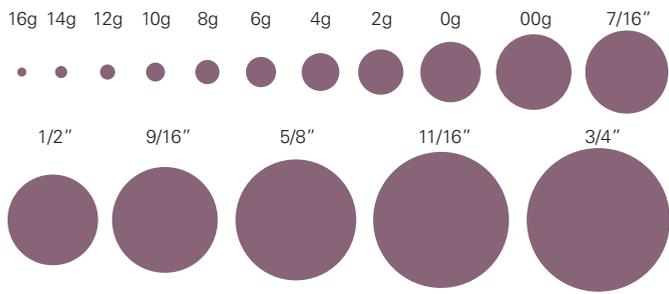
You may need to downsize (go back to your previous size) if the piercing is significantly irritated. Although you're probably eager to get to your goal size, downsizing is a great way to keep your tissue healthy. Afterwards, you will need to wait at least a few additional months before attempting further stretching. Go slow from the start and avoid having to downsize or stall your process.

The most common location for a blowout is the earlobe. It may not be as painful as it looks, but it does indicate a problem. You should consult your piercer. You may need to downsize, resume aftercare procedures, and/or follow other suggestions as outlined by your piercer.

***Disclaimer:** These guidelines are based on a combination of vast professional experience, common sense, research, and extensive clinical practice. This is not to be considered a substitute for medical advice from a doctor. If you suspect an infection, seek medical attention. Be aware that many doctors have not received specific training regarding piercing. Your local piercer may be able to refer you to a piercing-friendly medical professional if necessary.

Use of this brochure does not imply membership in the APP. A current list of APP members can be found at safepiercing.org. False claims of membership should be reported to the APP.

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GAUGE	INCHES	MILLIMETERS
20	1/64	.8
18	1/32	1
16	3/64	1.2
14	1/16	1.6
12	5/64	2
10	3/32	2.5
8	1/8	3.2
6	5/32	4
4	3/16	5
2	1/4	6
0	5/16	8
00	3/8	10
	7/16	11
	1/2	12
	9/16	14
	5/8	16
	11/16	18
	3/4	19
	13/16	20
	7/8	22
	15/16	24
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STRETCHING YOUR PIERCING

This is meant to be a guideline to assist you in safe and healthy stretching practices, and should not be substituted for a professional piercer's advice.

INTRODUCTION

Stretching: Is the gradual enlargement of a piercing. Stretching a piercing can be easy and safe so long as the risks are considered and some basic precautions are followed.

WHY STRETCH?

As your piercing increases in size your jewelry options can become more detailed and prominent. Properly stretched piercings displace weight and stress over a greater surface area so that larger jewelry can be worn safely and comfortably.

WHEN TO STRETCH

There is no set timetable that is correct for stretching each type of piercing or for each person. In fact, it is possible to have a pair of matching piercings with one that stretches more easily than the other. After moving up to a larger size, you must allow enough time for the tissue to recuperate and stabilize before repeating the process. This can take anywhere from several weeks to months or even longer, depending on the particular piercing and your tissue. Safe stretching involves both time and patience. At a minimum you want your piercing fully healed, matured, and pliable before you consider stretching. Consult a professional piercer if you are unsure of your piercing being ready to stretch.

CONSIDERATIONS

Stretching an existing, healed piercing is not the same as receiving a new piercing. Carefully consider the following before committing to a potentially permanent body modification:

How large can you go and still have the piercing return to its prior appearance if you take the jewelry out?

Experienced piercers observe varied results which seem to depend on several factors, including the type of jewelry worn, and how the piercing was stretched. Stretching too quickly can easily result in excessive scar tissue. Scarring in a piercing may limit tissue flexibility, lessen vascularity, limit future stretching, and reduce the piercing's ability to tighten or close should you decide to remove jewelry. Stretching a piercing may result in a permanent change. Be prepared for the possibility it may not return to its original appearance.

OVERSTRETCHING (GOING TOO FAR AND/OR TOO FAST)

Overstretching tends to result in a buildup of scar tissue and reduction of healthy blood flow. It can also cause an unsightly "blowout," in which a section of skin pushes out from the interior of the channel. Overstretching can damage your tissue, cause thinning, or even lead to the total loss of your piercing. Stretching more than one full gauge size should be avoided. Half sizes should be used when possible, particularly in larger size jumps or in sensitive areas. Piercings can only handle small incremental stretches without the delicate lining of the piercing becoming stressed, torn, or otherwise damaged.

Your body needs sufficient time to rejuvenate blood flow and produce new healthy tissue, this can take weeks or months.

STRETCHING YOUR PIERCING

If you choose to stretch your piercing yourself, the safest method is to allow your initial jewelry to remain in place for an extended period of time. So long as your piercing is showing no signs of tenderness, discharge or general irritation, a properly cleaned or sterilized piece of jewelry (that is no more than one gauge size larger than your current jewelry) may be gently inserted into your piercing. Forcing jewelry in using pressure is not a proper practice when stretching. You want to allow the piercing to relax enough that it can accept the next size with little or no effort. If the jewelry does not go in easily, or if you experience any significant discomfort or bleeding, immediately stop. This may mean your piercing is not ready to be stretched or that you require professional assistance.

Seeking out a professional piercer can be a wise choice for stretching, particularly if you have a larger goal size. Your piercer can evaluate your piercing and set realistic goals for stretching. A professional can help you choose the proper jewelry material, size, and style. Having your jewelry properly cleaned or sterilized, and inserted for you can help avoid overstretching or other damage that can lead to scarring. In some situations a tool called an **insertion taper** may be necessary to properly install your selected jewelry. Tapers should be considered a professional instrument, the same as a piercing needle. Tapers are not meant to force excessively large jewelry into a piercing, merely to help aid insertion. Misuse of any instrument can result in damage.

Does stretching hurt?

With many soft tissue piercings such as the earlobe there should be little to no discomfort with proper stretching. Some more sensitive piercings such as the nostril, lip, cartilage, or genital area may be uncomfortable even when stretched properly. Discomfort should never be severe with any stretching, piercings should never bleed or appear torn when stretched. This is a sign of overstretching. If these issues occur you may need to drop to a smaller size, or visit a professional piercer for assistance, to avoid damage to your piercing.

JEWELRY

- In a freshly stretched piercing, we suggest wearing jewelry of a style and material approved by the APP for new piercings. Avoid low quality jewelry or materials that are not appropriate for fresh piercings, such as acrylic, silicone, and organics (wood, bone, stone, or horn). See the APP brochure "**Jewelry for Initial Piercings**" to learn more.

- Alternative materials (such as the ones listed above) may be worn, if desired, after the area has fully healed. See the APP brochure "**Jewelry for Healed Piercings**" for details.

- Solid plugs and hollow eyelets are especially popular. For initial stretches, they should be single flared or non-flared, and preferably without grooves for O-rings. Caution: It can be damaging to put double-flared jewelry in a freshly stretched piercing.

- In the USA, jewelry thickness is most commonly measured by gauge* (rather than millimeters), and above a certain size (00 gauge), by fractions of an inch. The measurements become progressively bigger, so the stretch from 14 to 12 gauge is comparatively minimal (.43mm), but going from 4 up to 2 gauge is a substantial jump (1.36mm). The larger you go, the longer you usually need to wait between stretches. This is due to the escalating size differences between gauges, and also because the tissue often becomes more difficult to expand as you strain its capacity. If available, jewelry sized by millimeter (commonly used outside of the USA) increments will result in more gradual stretching.

- Do not use externally threaded jewelry or any jewelry with sharp edges for stretching as these can easily tear or scratch your piercing.

- Many large or heavy ornaments - especially hanging pieces - are not suited as a means of stretching or for freshly stretched piercings. Heavy rings, for example, can put excessive pressure against the bottom of a piercing and cause uneven stretching and/or thinning of the tissue. Once the area has recovered from enlargement, wearing heavier jewelry can be worn and may result in additional stretching.

- Do not wear tapered jewelry such as talons, taper pins, or spirals to stretch. These are not meant to be used as stretching tools and can frequently cause tissue damage from expanding too quickly. When tapered jewelry is used for stretching, the O-rings that keep the ornament in place can cause irritation and tissue thinning from excessive pressure.

AFTERCARE

Follow your piercer's advice about leaving your new, larger jewelry in place for a sufficient time. It could be difficult or impossible to reinsert the jewelry if removed too soon - even briefly - because the channel could shrink very quickly. Avoid removing jewelry in a recently stretched piercing for several days, possibly weeks.

A newly stretched piercing may experience some tenderness and inflammation. It is usually mild and may pass in as little as a few days. Still, it is prudent to follow the care suggested for new piercings. For details, consult your piercer and refer to the APP "**Suggested Aftercare Guidelines**" brochures.

LONG-TERM MAINTENANCE

Because a stretched piercing has an increased surface area, the normal deposits of piercing related discharge are also amplified. For long-term maintenance, wash or rinse your healed piercing under warm water in the shower as part of your daily hygiene routine. If jewelry is easily removed, take it out occasionally while bathing for a more thorough cleansing of both the tissue and jewelry. Consult your piercer about appropriate care for jewelry made of natural or alternative materials.

*Brown & Sharpe wire gauge system.

(CONTINUED ON BACK)