

Dentistry.co.uk

Staying connected to the dental profession

Fri, 6 Aug, 2010

Dentistry.co.uk News

Tongue piercings could be a dental nightmare

3rd August 2010



[A new case study shows that tongue piercings may cause long-term damage to teeth](#)

A new study in the US seems to suggest that tongue piercings can become an orthodontic nightmare.

Researchers at the University of Buffalo (UB), New York, published a case study in the *Journal of Clinical Orthodontics* which shows that when wearers 'play' with the stud piercings, by pushing it against their front teeth, it can force a gap between them.

'It is a basic tenet of orthodontics that force, over time, moves teeth,' explains the study's primary investigator, Sawsan Tabbaa, DDS, MS, assistant professor of orthodontics at the UB School of Dental Medicine.

A previous UB dental school survey study of Buffalo high school students revealed that the presence of a tongue piercing caused a damaging habit whereby subjects pushed the metal stud up against and between their upper front teeth, a habit commonly referred to among the students as 'playing'. According

to Tabbaa: 'It happened in very high percentage of the cases.'

The case study involved a 26-year-old female patient examined at UB's orthodontic clinic who complained that a large space had developed between her upper central incisors. The patient also had a tongue piercing that held a barbell-shaped stud.

The tongue was pierced seven years earlier and everyday she had pushed the stud between her upper front teeth, creating the space between them and, subsequently, habitually placing it in the space. The patient did not have a space between her upper front teeth prior to the tongue piercing.

The patient provided the research team with photos that demonstrated she had no diastema prior to having her tongue pierced. For the purposes of treating this patient's space, it was assumed that positioning of the tongue stud between the maxillary central incisors – or 'playing' – caused the midline space.

Tongue piercing can result in serious injury not just to teeth but has also been associated with haemorrhage, infection, chipped and fractured teeth, trauma to the gums and, in the worst cases, brain abscess, said Tabbaa.