Nipple piercings [1]

Dear Alice,

I was thinking about getting my nipple pierced and was wondering if it will make my nipple sag. If I decide after a few years that I don't want it anymore, can I still breastfeed? Will it permanently damage my nipple?

Answer

Dear Reader,

You've brought up some great points about the long-term risks of piercing your nipple(s). Fortunately, if you decide to get a piercing, you can very easily avoid damage to your body. For more information about safe piercing, visit the Association of Professional Piercers. [2]

Once you've found a piercing studio or store that you're comfortable with, be sure to choose a ring (or bar or stud) that's specifically designed for the nipple. Accessories for other body parts, such as ears, navels, or even genitalia, may not work as well because of the different lengths of the posts, the pressure exerted by the clasp, or the angle it closes or attaches. Sharp thinking should also tell you that the lighter the jewelry is, the less it will weigh down the nipple and contribute to sagging.

Nipple piercings can take a long time (up to 18 months) to heal and may, in some cases, cause scarring. Scarring can affect the breastfeeding process by making it harder for an infant to latch onto the nipple or by blocking the release of milk from the breast. Scarring is usually caused by multiple piercings in the same spot. If you're going for a one-shot deal, you'll probably avoid any permanent damage. The majority of women who have had nipple piercings are able to nurse their infants with no problems. Some women even breastfeed with a nipple piercing intact by replacing the jewelry with a plastic tube (a.k.a. a retainer) and switching back to the jewelry after the baby stops feeding.

Another alternative to switching between the ring and retainer could be to feed the baby from the non-pierced breast, if you've got one. However, this can cause the breasts to become and remain at different sizes for as long as you're breast-feeding. Breasts can triple or quadruple in weight and size in order to make room for the additional glands and tissues needed for milk production and secretion. Because the amount of milk a breast produces depends on how much is taken from it, nursing from the same breast all the time could cause it to become noticeably larger than the other one. The good news is that nursing bras come in all shapes,
sizes, and styles that can help disguise the unevenness. This will ensure that, when the time comes, people are looking at your baby, not your chest!

Alice!
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