

The Worst Piercing Story

In all my experience as a professional piercer since the 1980s, this is the worst thing that ever happened to anyone I pierced—and it happened to me.

On November 13, 1998, I pierced my own cheeks to mark a significant personal milestone. I placed the piercings in the natural indentations that appeared when I smiled. I had fantasized about this for years; I imagined wearing dainty, sparkling diamonds in my dimples.

I carefully marked each side. I inspected the area with a strong flashlight, and squeezed and pressed the tissue between my fingers. I didn't see or feel any anatomical structures.

My dimples are pretty far back, so it was a bit of a challenge, but I was very pleased with how they turned out. (Honestly, it didn't hurt.) During the following week I had the interesting sensation of having been smiling too much, and that was about it for discomfort.

I followed the standard care and experienced normal swelling and no bleeding. My healing course was fairly lengthy, as is expected in this area, but entirely uneventful.

The piercings took about seven months to heal, but they didn't bother me in the least. On a daily basis, people admired my unique adornments and made complimentary remarks about them. I loved the way my fancy dimples looked, and I felt at least 33.3 percent cuter with them.

About a year and a half after I did the piercings, though, the right side started to leak and I couldn't figure out why. Every once in a while a drop of clear, odorless, tasteless liquid came from the piercing, wetting my cheek. It was lighter than water and not at all viscous like saliva. I thought I might have an allergy and changed my soap and detergent. I thought I might have a jewelry problem

and tried larger discs. As time wore on, the leaking became worse and actually began to drip. My cheek became sore and chapped from the liquid, and from the friction of wiping it away. I went to my dentist for help. I saw an orofacial surgeon. My parotid glands and ducts were working fine, without obstruction. That was the good news. The bad news was that at some point a portion of the parotid gland or *duct* (the tube that delivers saliva from the gland to the mouth) opened into my piercing channel. Their advice: "Take those things out."

No way.

The leaking got progressively worse. The final straw was when the liquid from my cheek dripped from my face and landed right on someone I was about to pierce. Naturally, it is not at all appropriate for a piercer to deposit personal bodily fluids in the proximity of a fresh piercing. So, with extreme reluctance, I removed the jewelry and abandoned the piercings. I was devastated to be without my fancy dimples, so I figured out a way to glue small rhinestones into place where my jewelry used to shine.

My right cheek continued to leak off and on over the ensuing months, even after I took the jewelry out. I had to try something drastic. I used a medical tool called a cautery scalpel to burn the hole shut by generating scar tissue (not a service offered at piercing studios!). That worked for a few weeks, but then the leaking started yet again. It finally sealed completely after using the cautery scalpel for the third time, creating a deeper and more severe burn.

So, when people come to me requesting cheek piercing, I share this story with them, and obviously say, "No." I will not pierce the cheek area further back than the first molars. And, for obvious reasons, you shouldn't either.