What can go wrong?
As body piercing is considered to be a minor surgical procedure which involves breaking the skin, for this reason there is always a risk of the following:

- Allergic reactions - to jewellery, metals or antiseptics
- Severe swelling and inflammation around the piercing area
- Jewellery embedding under the swelling
- Scarring
- Excessive bleeding (if blood vessels are pierced)
- Piercing of cartilage - if the site becomes infected, it can develop into a painful abscess. It can also lead to deformity.
- Blood borne infection such as Hepatitis/HIV

If you have any doubts about a piercer, the premises or just having a piercing, just walk out and give yourself more time to think about it.

**Never attempt to carry out body piercing yourself.**

**Never use an unregistered piercer.**

If you have any concerns about a piercer in your area or want a list of locally registered piercers please contact the relevant local authority.

- **Central Bedfordshire Council**
  - 0300 300 8000
- **Bedford Borough Council**
  - 01234 718099
- **Luton Borough Council**
  - 01582 510 330

For further information go to www.nhs.uk and search piercings.
What is body piercing?
Body piercing is when a hollow needle is pushed through the skin and underlying tissue, making a hole through which jewellery is inserted. Piercing of the ears, nose, belly button and tongue are especially popular among teenagers and young adults. They are fairly safe procedures as long as they’re carried out by a professional piercer and care is taken by the piercer and yourself to avoid infection.

The healing times for the most common body piercing are as follows:

- Ear lobe — 6 weeks
- Top of the ear — at least 3 - 4 months
- Belly button – up to a year
- Tongue – 1 -2 months
- Nose – 2 - 3 months

What is the law on body piercing?
All businesses that carry out body piercing must be registered under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982. Local authorities have the powers to inspect any premises that carry out piercing and make sure that they comply with the local byelaws that relate to the hygiene of their premises, staff and equipment. The inspectors, usually Environmental health Officers will also issue a registration certificate for the premises and a separate one for the piercer. These should be displayed where people can see it at the premises.

How old do I have to be?
There is no legal minimum age for body piercing, however piercers should ask for parental consent if you are under the age of 16.

Girls and boys under the age of 16 cannot legally give consent to intimate sexual contact under any circumstances, so piercing of nipples and genitalia (for girls) or genitalia (for boys) can be regarded as an offence.

Do I really want to have a body piercing?
If you decide to have a body piercing, make sure you find a reputable registered premises and piercer. A list of this can be obtained from your local council listed at the back of the leaflet.

Here are some tips about what to look for:
A few days before having your piercing, visit the shop to check for any potential health risks. Make sure you can answer “yes” to the following questions before going ahead:

- Have you checked if the premises and piercer have been registered?
- Do they use a clean pair of disposable surgical gloves for each customer?
- Do they wash their hands regularly and use disposable paper towels to dry them?
- Is the premises clean?
- Do they use single-use needles and discard them after each piercing?

- Are instruments kept in sealed packaging ready for use, or in an autoclave (steriliser) until needed?
- Have the earrings been pre-sterilised?
- Is the piercer wearing clean, practical clothing, with long hair tied back?
- Is the jewellery used appropriate for the type of piercing?
- Is it made of non-nickel metal?
- Does the piercer have a clear policy regarding age restrictions and parental consent?
- Does the piercer ask for your medical history before you have a body piercing?

Aftercare
Once a piercing has been carried out, you should be told how to look after it and be given an after care advice sheet.

To avoid infection follow the advice given. This will usually involve keeping the area clean and dry recognising signs of infection.

Unwashed hands are the worst enemies when touching your piercings as this can spread enough germs to cause an infection.

Do not touch or fiddle with the area and do not turn the piercing. If a crust develops over the piercing, do not remove it- these form naturally and are the body’s way of protecting the pierced site.