

So you want to stretch your ears...

This guide has been created in order to help our clients safely reach their goals with stretching their ears or any other piercing that someone might want to stretch.

Weather you call it enlarging expanding, gauging or any other term, it's all the same act. It's the act of stretching a small hole to a larger hole, gradually over time. There is a great method of stretching any piercing that we use at Sub-Q and if you use it you should have really good results. If you skip steps or force the stretch too fast you can develop problems.

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## History

People have been stretching the natural holes in their bodies or holes that they have created for longer than the written word. There is even speculative evidence of earlobe stretching in Cro-Magnon gravesites! Ancient cultures like the Egyptians the Mayans, Aztecs and Incas all had some form of ear stretching too. So it's been around quite a while. It's only been more common the last decade or so in the United States to see people that have stretched their ears.

There are wonderful examples of people if tribal cultures throughout history and the world that have earlobe stretching as a cultural body decoration, The Punan-Dyak of Borneo, the Masai of Kenya and hordes of others still do it today. And some of the holes in the ears of these people are huge. It's not uncommon for Punan Dyak children to have holes in their ears that are an inch and a half in diameter. And some of the holes in the adults of that tribe have holes large enough to fit a newborn baby through! Nowadays in

the U.S. It's fairly common to see people with holes in their ears a half inch or even larger too.

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## **The Process**

As was written in the introduction there is a step-by-step process that we use at Sub-Q to help our clients reach their goals for stretching. The closer that you follow these steps fewer problems will usually arise. You can break it down into 4 basic steps.

1. One size at a time
  2. take time between each stretch
  3. Don't stretch when you aren't ready
  4. Keep the piercing clean
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## **One size at a time**

The term gauge represents the thickness of the jewelry or tools used to stretch. It doesn't represent the act of stretching. Often people will call getting their ears stretched "gauging". The term gauging actually means measuring and the term gauge means size or measurement. Below is a representation of the sizes (gauges) of the jewelry used in the piercing industry in the United States. There are other sizes past the ones listed but after 2ga, typically most in the piercing industry switches to fractional measurement

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## **One size at a time continued**

If you look at the gauges and the decimal measurement below each one, you may notice a pattern. Each fourth gauge is double the first one. Basically 14ga is double 20ga and 12ga is double 18ga, 10ga is double 16ga and so on, and so on. It makes things really handy to know that pattern when you need to know what the actual measurement for each gauge is. The gauge chart has a name too. It's the American Standard Wire Gauge chart. The chart was developed by Brown and Sharps in the 1920's for the standardization of wire manufacturing and it's been in use ever since.

The enemy of stretching is scar tissue. Piercings are really just scars anyway, but minimizing the scar tissue when you are

enlarging the hole is what you want to do, The less scar tissue that is present the better' Ultimately you shouldn't stretch more than one size at a time. The most common mistake made by people first starting to stretch their ears is to skip sizes. When you skip sizes the skin usually can't handle the stretch and it tears. The tears that are created from stretching the skin too soon cause a buildup of the scar tissue. Scar tissue tears easier when there is more present and the tears that happen build up even more scar tissue that we are trying to avoid. That scar tissue tears when you stretch it the next time and builds up more scar tissue. It starts a vicious cycle that is next to impossible to stop, Ultimately if you continue the practice of stretching too much at once you will end up with a really big mass of scar tissue that doesn't shrink. It can be pretty ugly. You may have heard the term Keloid (pronounced key-floyd) tissue before. When scar tissue builds up unchecked or uncontrolled that's what it becomes. That's not the only thing that can create Keloid tissue, but it's definitely can be one of the ways it comes.

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### **Take Your Time Between Stretching**

When you stretch your skin, even if you don't feel it or if you are following the 'one size at a time' way of stretching, the skin usually gets really tiny tears in it just below the surface. Those little tears need to heal and form new skin. Granted that new skin is scar tissue, but it is minimal in comparison to if you stretch too much. Not only does it need to heal, it also needs to 'season'. What the term 'season' means is to thicken and relax. Once the inside surface of the piercing seasons and relaxes, it can be stretched again.

The earmark of time that we usually recommend is about 3 weeks to a month between stretching. Under some circumstances you can push the timeframe a bit closer between stretches, but it's always a good idea to wait a while. The rule of thumb is the longer between stretching the better. Stay patient, you'll reach you're goal.

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### **Don't Stretch When You Aren't Ready**

This idea goes hand in hand with taking time between stretching,

but sometimes even if there's been the right amount of time between stretching the skin inside the hole may not be ready to stretch. Usually when the stretch happens there are little tears that occur. If the skin inside the hole has a hard time healing you may not even notice that it isn't ready, If there is any pain or tenderness the piercing isn't ready to stretch. If there is obvious open skin on the edges of the hole or any oozing of lymph fluid it isn't ready either. Most of the time when a piercing is ready it may start to have a strange smell and it will have no form of oozing or pain involved. It may take a few times of stretching before you know your body and when it's ready.

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### **Keep the Piercing Clean**

If you don't keep any piercing clean that you are stretching problems can arise. First of all the act of stretching actually creates new skin. The skin that you are creating does the same thing that the rest of the skin on your body does. It builds up oils and exfoliates. The oils that your skin makes mix with the dead skin that the piercing is sloughing off and it makes a paste. Our bodies have billions of bacteria on them. If you let the paste inside the piercing build up, the bacteria that you have on your body will begin to increase in that area. Their numbers increase because the paste is food to them. Ultimately if you let a piercing go too long without cleaning it the bacteria can build up to a point that they start to eat the skin that lines the piercing.

Imagine this for a minute. The inside of the piercing is being eaten by bacteria, so the skin starts becomes open and then a flood of bacteria flows into the open skin and an infection starts. It can take days or even weeks to get rid of an infection when you get one this way.

On top of the issue of infection, even if you can avoid getting one the paste that builds up in the hole can really stink. Imagine going to kiss someone on the neck or ear and getting a nose full of the smell of an unclean belly button. Yuck. Now imagine someone going to kiss you on the neck or ear and you haven't washed your ear piercings for the last two or three weeks,

All of this can be avoided by using soap and water once a day inside the hole of the piercing. A stretched piercing is a new orifice in your body. Treat it like you treat any other natural hole that you have. Wash it. You won't regret it.

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## **Your Rights**

At Sub-Q we believe that your rights as our customer and as a consumer are important. And since the services that we offer are a bit out of the norm, it's important that we define those rights.

We believe that all of our customers have the same types of rights as they would have at a typical retail establishment, but we want to take it the extra mile for our industry. Typically in the body piercing industry, some of the rights that you would have as a consumer would be eliminated. Most places that perform body piercing don't allow for things like 'trade-ins" for jewelry or refunds of any kind. Sub-Q offers both. And we go the extra step of putting it in writing. Our refund and return policies are simple and direct, Within the first 4 days, if you don't like your new piercing for any reason, simply return with the jewelry still in, and we'll refund your money, minus the cost of the aftercare products that we supplied.

Jewelry purchase is a bit different. If you purchase jewelry, have opened the package and wish to return it, we offer only 25% credit. Since we have to put the jewelry through a remanufacturing process, we can't offer a full price refund. But if the jewelry is still in its original, sterile packaging, we can refund your full purchase price. All refunds and trade-ins, are strictly at the discretion of Sub-Q employee's.

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## **Your Responsibilities**

Your responsibilities, like your rights, are also direct and simple. The aftercare of your new piercing is strictly up to you. The closer that you follow the instructions that we give to care for your new piercing, the faster and more smoothly your piercing will heal. There are different ways to care for a piercing and many work well. Some ways may not work so well, and some may be outright bad.

Ears

But from the experience of the staff at Sub-Q the aftercare instructions that we give work very well, It's also your responsibility to contact us for your needs. We want to help you in any way that we can, but we can't help you if you don't contact us. Even if you think it's trivial, your concern could be important. Please let us know how we can help you.

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