



Tattoos

What are tattoos and why do people get them?

Tattoos are a type of body art that mark the skin. Temporary tattoos, like henna, put ink on top of the skin. These tattoos wash off over a few days or weeks. For permanent tattoos, a needle or sharp object is used to put ink under the skin. The most common reasons people get tattoos today are to express personal values, remember a special memory, or show they are part of a group.

What things should I consider before I get a tattoo?

It is important to think before you ink! Most tattoos are made to be permanent. The most common problem people have after getting a tattoo is wishing they had not done it. If you decide to get a tattoo, think hard about what design you choose and where it will be put on your body. If your tattoo is in a place that can be seen by others, some people who see it may treat you differently. Some jobs may require you to cover a tattoo. Tattoo ink is made up of a lot of different chemicals that are not tested for humans. It is not known if tattoo inks can cause health problems many years later.

Are there reasons I should not get a tattoo?

You should not get a tattoo if you are pregnant, breastfeeding, or have an allergy to nickel or chromium. A tattoo should never be placed near the scar of a skin cancer. If you have any serious health problem such as HIV, heart problems, blood clotting problems, latex allergy, psoriasis, lupus, or sarcoidosis, talk with your health care provider to see if getting a tattoo is safe for you. If you have skin problems such as eczema or if you make keloid scars, a tattoo might cause those problems to become worse.

How should I choose a tattoo artist?

Many states have licenses and rules for professional tattoo artists, who are also called tattooists. Look for a professional tattoo artist who you feel comfortable with and can answer your questions. Ask about their training and licensure. Look for a studio that is clean and only uses sterilized needles from sealed packages. Professional tattoo artists usually use commercial tattoo machines. These machines have several needles close together that enter the skin quickly. Homemade machines are usually used by tattoo artists who do not have professional training. These machines often have a single needle and make smaller tattoos with thin lines. Using a tattoo artist who is not a professional also increases the chance of problems after you get a tattoo.

What should I expect when I get a tattoo?

Placing a tattoo creates a large shallow wound in your skin. The tattoo artist should clean the skin first, use sterile needles, and wear gloves the whole time. The skin is not numbed before getting a tattoo, so it hurts when the tattoo is being put under your skin. How deep the needle goes is important. If the needles go too deep, the ink will fade quicker. If the needles do not go deep enough, the tattoo will not be permanent.

The new tattoo will be covered with a bandage. Some ink will rub off on the bandage, which is normal. The skin around the tattoo will be red and swollen for several days after you receive the tattoo. Tattoos fade over time and the edges blur. Sunlight causes tattoos to fade faster. Although the tattoo design won't change, it may look different if you have skin changes due to weight gain or loss, aging, pregnancy, or skin disorders.



What are some problems that might happen after getting a tattoo?

The methods used during tattooing and the place on your body where it is put affect the risks related to the tattoo. The most common problems in the first days are pain, swelling, redness, and itching at the site of the tattoo. Sometimes the itching, redness, and swelling won't go away, which means you have an allergy to the tattoo ink.

Complications that are not common include:

- Infection at the site of the tattoo or more rarely an infection in your blood
- Infection of the blood like hepatitis or HIV if the equipment used isn't clean
- Scar tissue, such as granulomas (red bumps on the skin) or keloids

If you have severe pain, redness, swelling, or pus coming from your tattoo, or if you think you may be having an allergic reaction to the ink, call your health care provider.

What if I want to have a permanent tattoo removed?

Be very sure that you want a tattoo before you get one because they are permanent. Removing tattoos is very expensive and painful, and it often does not work completely. Tattoo removal is usually done with a laser. The laser destroys the cells that hold the tattoo ink. Several laser treatments may be needed.

For More Information

Center for Young Women's Health: Tattoos

<https://youngwomenshealth.org/2013/08/12/tattoos/>

Food and Drug Administration: Think Before You Ink: Are Tattoos Safe?

<https://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm048919.htm>

Mayo Clinic: Tattoos

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/tattoos-and-piercings/art-20045067>

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