

FAQ'S

How tattoos are done

A tattoo is a permanent mark or design made on your skin with pigments inserted through pricks into the skin's top layer. Typically, the tattoo artist uses a hand-held machine that acts much like a sewing machine, with one or more needles piercing the skin repeatedly. With every puncture, the needles insert tiny ink droplets.

The process — which is done without anesthetics — causes a small amount of bleeding and slight pain depending on your pain threshold.

Know the risks

Tattoos breach the skin, which means that skin infections and other complications are possible, including:

- **Allergic reactions.** Tattoo dyes — possible allergic skin reactions, such as an itchy rash at the tattoo site. This can occur even years after you get the tattoo.
- **Skin infections.** A skin infection is possible after tattooing if your tattoo is not properly cared for after by the client.
- **Other skin problems.** Sometimes an area of inflammation called a granuloma can form around tattoo ink. Tattooing also can lead to keloids — raised areas caused by an overgrowth of scar tissue.
- **Bloodborne diseases.** If the equipment used to create your tattoo is contaminated with infected blood, you can contract various bloodborne diseases — including methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), hepatitis B and hepatitis C.
- **MRI complications.** Rarely, tattoos or permanent makeup might cause swelling or burning in the affected areas during magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) exams. In some cases, tattoo pigments can interfere with the quality of the image.

Medication or other treatment might be needed if you experience an allergic reaction to the tattoo ink or you develop an infection or other skin problem near a tattoo.

Make sure you're ready

Before you get a tattoo, think carefully about it. If you're unsure or worried that you might regret it, give it more time. Don't allow yourself to be pressured into getting a tattoo, and don't get a tattoo if you're under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Choose the location of the tattoo carefully. Consider whether you want the option to hide your tattoo under clothing. Also remember that weight gain — including pregnancy weight gain — might distort the tattoo or affect its appearance.

Insist on safety precautions

To make sure your tattoo will be applied safely, ask these questions:

- **Who does the tattooing?** Go to a reputable tattooing studio that employs only properly trained employees. Keep in mind that regulation requirements and licensing standards vary from state to state. Check with your city, county or state health department for information on local licensing and regulations.
- **Does the tattoo artist wear gloves?** Make sure the tattoo artist washes his or her hands and wears a fresh pair of protective gloves for each procedure.
- **Does the tattoo artist use proper equipment?** Make sure the tattoo artist removes the needle and tubes from sealed packages before your procedure begins. Any pigments, trays or containers should be unused as well.
- **Does the tattoo artist sterilize disposable equipment?** Make sure the tattoo artists use disposable equipment and sterilize non-disposable equipment including drawer handles, tables and sinks after each use.

Take good care of your tattoo

How you care for your new tattoo depends on the type and extent of work done.

Typically, however, you'll need to:

- **Keep the tattooed skin clean.** Use plain soap and water and a gentle touch. While showering, avoid direct streams of water on the newly tattooed skin. Pat — don't rub — the area dry.
- **Use moisturizer.** Apply a mild moisturizer to the tattooed skin several times a day.
- **Avoid sun exposure.** Keep the tattooed area out of the sun for at least a few weeks.
- **Avoid swimming.** Stay out of pools, hot tubs, rivers, lakes and other bodies of water while your tattoo is healing.
- **Choose clothing carefully.** Don't wear anything that might stick to the tattoo.

- **Allow up to 2 weeks for healing.** Don't pick at any scabs, which increases the risk of infection and can damage the design and cause scarring.

If you think your tattoo might be infected or you're concerned that your tattoo isn't healing properly, contact your doctor. If your tattoo isn't what you expected and you're interested in tattoo removal, ask your dermatologist about laser surgery or other options for tattoo removal.

(Taken from the Mayo Clinic)