

Tattoos and Permanent Make-up

Before getting a tattoo or permanent make-up, here is what you should know. A tattoo is a mark or design on the skin. A permanent tattoo is meant to last forever. It is made with a needle and colored ink. The needle puts the ink into the skin.

Many colors used in tattoo inks are not approved by the FDA to be used on the skin. Some of these colors are meant for printing or painting cars.

Types of Tattoos

There are many different kinds of tattoos. For example:

- Permanent tattoos: a needle is used to insert colored ink into the skin.
- Permanent make-up: permanent tattoos use a needle to insert colored ink into the skin. It makes it look like make-up, such as eyebrow pencil, lip liner, eyeliner or blush.
- Henna (mehndi) tattoos: a natural plant dye called henna or mehndi is used to stain the skin. This kind of tattoo does not use needles. The color lasts 2 to 3 weeks. Use of henna in tattoos is illegal. Henna is only approved for use as a hair dye. It should not be put on the skin.
- "Sticker" type temporary tattoos: The tattoo design is on a piece of coated paper. It is put on the skin with water. Temporary tattoos last only a few days. Don't use tattoos from other countries. The FDA might not approve the colors. You might be allergic to them.

Why would someone want a tattoo?

- To restore a natural look to the face or breast, especially after surgery.
- They have trouble putting on makeup as a result of a medical condition.
- They have lost their eyebrows

What are the risks?

- Infection: Dirty needles can pass infections from one person to another person. These can be serious like Hepatitis and HIV. Make sure that the needles are clean and germ-free.
- You might be allergic to something used in your tattoo. This is rare, but can cause serious problems.
- Lumps or bumps may form around the tattoo color.
- People may have swelling or burning in the tattoo when they have magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). This happens rarely and does not last very long.
- You may not like your tattoo even if it was done well. Not liking the tattoo is the most common reason people give for having one removed.
- If you decide you want to get rid of a tattoo, it usually takes many treatments and costs a lot of money.
- Scars may form when getting or removing a tattoo.

Remember...

Think very carefully before getting a tattoo. Most tattoos are permanent. Removing tattoos and permanent make-up can be hard and can cost a lot of money. Sometimes, it cannot be done. It often means surgery and scarring.

Tattoos and Permanent Make-up (cont.)

I don't like this tattoo anymore. How can I get rid of it?

Tattoo removal should be done by a doctor or clinic and not by a tattoo parlor. There are several ways to try to remove a tattoo, but they don't always work. It can cost a lot of money and you may need a lot of treatment. Here are some choices:

- Laser treatment is the most common way to remove a tattoo. Light from the laser breaks up the tattoo ink. The body itself gets rid of the treated areas over the next few weeks. Most tattoos need more than one laser treatment to be fully removed. Some inks cannot be removed by lasers
- Dermabrasion: Sanding down to lower layers of skin is another way to remove a tattoo. The area to be sanded is numbed first to lessen pain. It may leave a scar.
- Salabrasion: a salt solution is used to remove the color. This is called salabrasion and is sometimes used with dermabrasion. Salabrasion is not used often.
- Scarification: removes the tattoo with acid and leaves a scar in its place.
- You can have surgery to get rid of the tattoo.
- New colors can be put into the skin to cover up the old tattoo.

Does the FDA control tattoos?

FDA does not control the tattoo parlors. Each state has its own laws for this.

How should I report a bad reaction or report a complaint?

They can be reported by contacting your FDA district office, or by contacting FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition Adverse Events Reporting System in one of the following ways:

- by phone at 1-800-FDA-1088
- by fax at 1-800-FDA-1078
- by email at CAERS@cfsan.fda.gov

To Learn More...

FDA: 1-888-463-6332 (1-888-INFO-FDA)
<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/cos-204.html>