

GUIDE FOR PATIENTS

Tattoos and body piercing: What you need to know

Many teenagers and preteenagers think about having their body tattooed or pierced. If you are considering this type of "body art," read and think carefully about the following information.

✿ **Tattoos should be considered permanent.** Removing a tattoo, even a small one, is very expensive and usually leaves a scar. Many young adults who get a tattoo later regret doing so because they are embarrassed by the design or location of the tattoo. Furthermore, a tattoo can make it more difficult to get a job.

Before getting a tattoo, ask yourself: "How will I feel about the tattoo in five years?" "Will I still want this name or picture on my body?" "Will I be embarrassed if other people can see it?" You may want to try wearing a temporary tattoo first to help you make your decision.

✿ **Tattoos for young people may be illegal where you live.** Some states and cities have laws that forbid tattooing of children and teenagers under 18 years of age.

✿ **Tattoos and body piercings can cause infection.** Many bacterial and viral infections can be spread during the process of getting body art. **DO NOT HAVE A FRIEND DO TATTOOING OR PIERCING FOR YOU, and DO NOT DO IT YOURSELF.** The risk of infection and other complications is greater when people apply their own body art. Carefully investigate the establishment where you are planning to have tattooing or piercing done:

- The shop should have a machine called an autoclave to sterilize the equipment.
- The work area should be very clean.
- The artist should wash his or her hands before the procedure and wear surgical gloves while tattooing or piercing.
- Ink and pigment containers should be used for only one person. The containers should be thrown away after each customer.
- All needles should be sterile and disposable.
- The artist should give you written information about how to take care of your tattoo or piercing. Follow those directions carefully.
- Ask the artist for references.
- Find out what other rules apply to tattoo and piercing shops in your area—do people who do tattoos and body piercing have to be licensed, for example. You can get this information from your local health department.

Following these guidelines should decrease your risk of infection. But remember that infection is always possible when the skin is punctured. If the skin that has been pierced or tattooed becomes red, swollen, or painful, please let your parents or doctor know. Do not have more than two piercings done at the same time because it is difficult to take proper care of more than two piercings and the pain from multiple piercings may be intense.

✿ **Tattooing and body piercing can be painful.** **DO NOT DRINK ALCOHOL OR TAKE DRUGS** before the procedure to lessen the pain. Not only can alcohol and drugs cause you to make bad decisions that you will later regret, but they can also cause you to bleed more, which may ruin the tattoo design.

✿ **Tattooing and body piercing can cause allergic reactions.** Some people have an allergy to the pigments used in tattoos or the metals in jewelry. Choose jewelry made of stainless steel, titanium, or 14 K gold. Avoid jewelry that may contain nickel, which is known to cause reactions.

✿ **Teenagers sometimes make decisions about tattoos and body piercings when they are emotionally upset.** Wait to make this decision until you have had time to think carefully about it.

✿ **Ask your pediatrician** if you have other health questions or concerns about tattooing or piercing. Your doctor wants to help you make healthy choices.

Where to get more information

The Alliance of Professional Tattooists, Inc. (APT)
2108 South Alverton Way
Tucson, AZ 85711
520-514-5549
e-mail: info@safe-tattoos.com
www.safe-tattoos.com

Members must take a nine-hour class on infectious diseases. Organization offers information for members and the public, including what to look for in a tattoo shop and a pamphlet, "Basic Guidelines for Getting a Tattoo."

Virtual Hospital
vh.org/Patients/IHB/Derm/Tattoo
"Tattooing and Body Piercing: Decision Making for Teens" by Barbara Freyenberger

This site offers excellent, medically accurate information.