



Fact Sheet

Student Health Services, Texas A&M University

Body Art & Body Modification

Body art is one of the oldest forms of artistic expression known to humankind and more college students are increasingly interested in these practices.

Body Art:

- Tattoo: permanent marking of skin with ink or dye
- Branding/Scarification: skin is seared with a hot iron or cut with a scalpel or other sharp object to produce a raised design
- Body Paint: temporary form of body art which includes Mehndi
- Piercing: sharp instrument is passed through a fold of skin or part of body
- Permanent Makeup: form of tattooing most commonly applied to eyebrows, eyelids and lips
- Aesthetic dentistry: can include gold/silver/porcelain caps or “grills”
- Body Play or Shaping: includes body suspension, waist/corset training, implanting foreign objects under the skin

Health Risks:

Blood-borne diseases: if the equipment is contaminated with the blood of an infected person, you can contract a number of illnesses including **Hepatitis B/C, Tetanus, Tuberculosis, and HIV**

Skin disorders: body may form granulomas around tattoo ink or may form keloids (raised excessive scarring)

Skin infection: may lead to local bacterial infections

Allergic reaction: some tattoo dye (red) can cause an allergic skin reaction, or some piercing jewelry may cause an allergic reaction

Things to Consider...

- Tattoos, brands, and some forms of piercing are usually PERMANENT.
- There is no guarantee that you'll love it and you usually can't get your money back
- Do the procedure in two steps. Get a stencil one day and go back within the next day or two to have the actual tattoo applied
- Take a friend to give you some comfort while you have your procedure done
- Choose artist and studio carefully

Body Art Aftercare

- Keep area clean and dry until it is completely healed.
- Use a topical antibiotic and/or antibacterial cleanser.
- Cover tattoos with sunscreen to avoid fading.
- Use the correct size jewelry for piercing and also use correct type of medal.

When to See Your Provider

- Signs and symptoms might indicate that you need to seek medical attention for your body art:
- Redness or swelling
- Discharge that is thick yellow or green colored
- Increased or persistent pain
- Continued bleeding or oozing
- Red streaks originating from the site
- Fever or localized heat or warmth
- Swollen glands

Tattoo Removal—*Removal of body art usually costs 5 to 40 times more than the original art and usually there is always some trace of body modification*

- *Laser Treatments:* Uses lasers to lighten tattoos over a several visits.
- *Dermabrasion:* Abrading layers of skin with a wire brush or diamond fraise
- *Salabrasion:* Salt solution used to remove the pigment, is sometimes used in conjunction with dermabrasion
- *Scarification:* Removes tattoo with an acid solution and creates a scar in its place
- *Surgical Removal:* Tissue expanders used so that when the tattoo is cut away there is less scarring
- *Camouflaging* Entails the injection of new pigments either to form a new pattern or cover a tattoo with skin-toned pigments.

Body Art Studio Safety Checklist

- Is it clean and well lit?
- Does it provide client privacy?
- Are there receptacles for medical waste?
- Do they have and use an autoclave to sterilize reusable tools, equipment and body jewelry?
- Do artists have access to a sink or waterless hand washing supplies?
- Do artists use gloves while working on clients?
- Do artists have infection control training?
- Do artist have CPR training and certification?
- Can artists provide documentation of having hepatitis B vaccinations?
- Do tattoo artists dispense inks in small disposable cups?
- Do body artists use needles rather than piercing guns?
- Do body artists use disposable needles?
- Does the studio provide after-care information?

Resources

Villanova University Health and Wellness Education, Resources for Well-being: Body Art; Mayo Clinic—Tattoos and piercings: What to know before hand; University of New Mexico Hospitals Health Science Center— Health Smart: Tattoo Safety; U.S. Food & Drug Administration—Tattoos and Permanent Makeup