

## BODY ART: PIERCING AND TATTOOING

**Think before you act!** This is a permanent body change. It really is a big deal! Take time to be sure that **you** want this body art for your own self-expression. Invest plenty of time for thought and research, before you act, so that what seems cool now does not turn into a source of regret later.

**Protect yourself!** Do your research and find a reputable professional piercer or tattoo artist. Do some detective work. Go to the shop before you schedule a piercing or tattoo to make sure the place looks clean and to ask some important questions:

Ask for proof that equipment used is sterilized in a FDA approved autoclave.

- Check to make sure they follow universal precautions (they should be able to tell you that these are procedures that prevent you and them from infection from contact with body fluids, especially blood.)
- The person who performs the piercing/tattoo should wash their hands and wear disposable gloves.
- Only disposable or sterilized instruments should be used.
- Don't receive a piercing from a piercing gun. These devices cannot be autoclaved (sterilized) and may increase your risk of infection.
- The needle used should be new and being used for the first time and should be disposed of properly after use.

- Only nontoxic metals should be used for body piercing (i.e. surgical steel, solid 14K or 18K gold, niobium, titanium, platinum.)
- Also, make sure you are up to date on your immunizations (tetanus and hepatitis B) and plan where you'll get medical care if your piercing/tattoo becomes infected.

### Parent consent.

- Is required if you are younger than 18 years and the piercing/tattoo is being done in the city of Minneapolis.
- Many tattoo artists will **not** tattoo someone younger than 18 even with parent consent.
- Check the parent consent rules for the city in which you plan to get your tattoo/piercing. Rules may differ from city to city.

### WHO SHOULD NOT GET A PIERCING OR TATTOO

You should not get a tattoo or piercing if you have any of the following health problems:

Diabetes	Cancer
Thrombocytopenia	Hemophilia
Immune problems	Neutropenia
Heart valve problems	Endocarditis
Keloid scar formation	Heart murmur
Artificial heart valve	Take steroids
Congenital heart defect	

### SAFETY ISSUES

- No federal regulations for piercing and tattooing
- State regulations for piercing and tattooing are limited.
- Cities do regulate and license piercers and tattoo artists. Check with your city to make sure the professional you choose is compliant.
- No FDA (federal drug association) inspection of tattoo pigments but it does establish standards for equipment sterilization (autoclaves).
- No standard licensing test exists for piercers or tattoo artists, however the city in which the artist operates often has licensing requirements.
- Never let a friend pierce or tattoo you. Never tattoo or pierce yourself. These practices carry a high risk of reaction and infection.
- You cannot donate blood for one year after having a tattoo or piercing.

### HEALTH RISKS and COMPLICATIONS

**Diseases** (HIV, hepatitis C, B and D, tetanus, tuberculosis, herpes, warts)

#### Bleeding

**Infection** (lots of green/gray discharge, odor, swelling, redness, warmth, pain)

**Skin irritation** (redness, dryness, tenderness)

**Allergic reactions** (itching, burning, redness, tenderness, scabbing, sloughing)

**Jewelry rejection** (especially navel)  
**Keloid scar formation** (large, ridged areas of overgrown scar tissue)

### **Granulomas**

**MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) complications** from interference from dyes

## **CARING FOR YOUR BODY ART**

(You will get specific instructions from your artist, the following are general guidelines for care):

### **TATTOO**

1. Bandage for 12-24 hours remove the bandage by moistening the gauze.
2. Wash with warm water and soap, do not re-bandage.
3. Apply triple antibiotic ointment a few times a day for 5 days
4. After 5 days apply a thin layer of A&D ointment 3 times a day for 1-2 weeks and whenever the tattoo looks dry or flakey.
5. For the first 2 weeks do not expose the tattoo to direct sunlight, after that apply 30 SPF sunscreen over the tattoo whenever exposed to sunlight.
6. Do not swim, hot tub or take long baths for several weeks after a tattoo.
7. Never use Vaseline, alcohol or hydrogen peroxide on a tattoo.

### **PIERCING**

1. Wash the area 2 times a day with antibacterial soap and water,
2. Move the jewelry back and forth during daily cleaning,
3. Over-cleaning can delay healing times and can irritate the piercing.

4. Never use Vaseline, alcohol, hydrogen peroxide or betadine, on the piercing site.
5. Avoid wearing clothing that rubs on the piercing site.
6. Avoid getting perfume, hair spray and hair gel on the piercing site.

**Tongue piercing** requires special attention:

- Rinse the mouth with alcohol-free mouthwash,
- Rinse the mouth after meals and snacks.
- If bad breath develops, switch from mouth wash to salt water rinses (1/4 tsp. salt in 1 cup warm water).
- Do not play with the jewelry, share eating utensils or engage in oral sex during the healing time.

### **HEALING TIMES**

<b>TYPE OF PIERCING</b>	<b>TIME TO HEAL</b>
Ear lobe	6-8 weeks
Ear cartilage	4 months to 1 year
Eyebrow	6-8 weeks
Nostril	2-4 months
Nasal septum	6-8 months
Nasal bridge	8-10 weeks
Tongue	4 weeks
Lip	2-3 months
Nipple	3-6 months
Navel	4 months to 1 year
Female genitalia	4-10 weeks
Male genitalia	4 weeks to 6 months

A **tattoo** usually heals in 10-14 days, if well cared for, and can take up to 30 days to look normal.

## **WHEN TO SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION**

### **Signs of infection**

- Excessive redness
- Heat
- Odor
- Excessive tenderness
- Dark discharge
- Streaks in the surrounding tissue

## **WHAT TO DO IF YOU DON'T WANT IT ANYMORE**

Seek the advice of a medical professional.

**Tattoo:** laser treatment, dermabrasion, salabrasion, scarification, or surgery is usually required to remove the dyes from the skin.

**Piercing:** jewelry can be removed but may leave unsightly holes and these may require cosmetic surgery to correct.

Minneapolis Department of Health and Family Support  
School-Based Clinic Program