



Tattoo Aftercare

* **DISCLAIMER:** These guidelines are based on a combination of vast professional experience, common sense, research, and extensive clinical practice. This is not to be considered a substitute for medical advice from a doctor. If you suspect an infection, seek medical attention. Be aware that many doctors have not received specific training regarding tattoos.

THE CARE AND HEALING OF YOUR NEW TATTOO

There are a wide variety of opinions about what the best aftercare regimen is for ensuring the best results for your new Tattoo. Considerations include the speed and cleanliness in healing your new tattoo, but also the method resulting in obtaining the best color. Your tattoo artist undoubtedly will have something very definite to say about aftercare, and it is probably a good idea to listen to him/her. Below is our personal advice based on the combined experience of tattooing, getting tattooed, and from conversations with our many artists and enthusiast friends.

A tattoo normally takes 7 to 10 days to heal. There are no “idiot-proof” instructions for the care and healing of a tattoo, but we think if you read — and FOLLOW — our suggestions below, that you’ll have an excellent chance of making sure that your new Tattoo will be the best that it can be!

1. **Bandaging Your Freshly Done Tattoo.**

When your tattoo artist has finished applying your tattoo he or she will typically “wipe” the tattoo down with soap, then apply a thin coat of A&D ointment then bandage it. Depending on

the size of the tattoo, this may be done with a simple gauze bandage or multiple bandages and medical tape.

2. How Long Before I Can Remove the Bandage?

Naturally, most people want to remove the bandage to show off their new tattoo right away. But you should wait at least a few hours. Principally, this is to allow the traumatized skin to heal and the “oozing” (lymphatic fluid and blood) to stop flowing. These fluids may drain and collect in the bandage for an hour or more on a fresh tattoo.

After 1-2 hours feel free to remove the bandage. Once you have removed the bandage, clean your new tattoo well with mild, non-abrasive soap and warm water. **DO NOT SCRUB** – but your tattoo is not as delicate as you might think either. Clean it well — massage and remove the excess ink and dried fluid and be sure to remove the residue of any ointment that may have been applied.

CAUTION: If you are exposing your tattoo in the shower, do not let the full force of the shower spray directly onto the newly tattooed skin. Let the shower spray run indirectly over your body to wash the tattoo. You will also find that a lukewarm shower is more comfortable and will not “sting” your new tattoo. Hot water (and STEAM) opens the skin’s pores and can cause greater loss of pigment during the healing process.

NOTE: Do not leave the bandage on TOO LONG! Keeping freshly tattooed skin wrapped tightly for more than 8 hours frequently can lead to skin rashes (localized bacterial infections) and your tattoo breaking-out all “pimply” — the bandage should protect the tattoo only while the natural body fluids drain, then exposure to air is needed for your skin to heal properly. Remember, the purpose of the bandage is principally to collect the seepage of body fluids in the first couple of hours after the tattoo has been completed. Unless you are engaged in work where there is a great likelihood that dirt, grease, and other contaminants may come in direct contact with your new tattoo, it is not necessary to re-bandage it. And if you do have that type of potential exposure at work, etc., it is better to cover your tattoo with loose-fitting, protective clothing, rather than a new bandage.

3. **Care During the First Week.** Care is pretty simple thereafter. You do NOT need to re-bandage the tattoo!!! In fact, it would simply prolong the healing time — and risk scabbing and loss of color if you are applying a new bandage (they tend to “stick” to the skin, and promote the creation of thicker scabbing on the tattoo). Instead, simply moisturize the tattoo lightly with lotion — no more than 3 or 4 times a day. Tattoo-only products are simply unnecessary (all of which are simply variations on other readily available skin lotions and creams).

We recommend using a gentle hypoallergenic, white, unscented lotion for the first 2 or 3 days and gently massage a small amount into the tattoo. **IMPORTANT: DO NOT SLATHER YOUR TATTOO WITH ANY CREAMS OR LOTIONS!** Doing so will cause the skin to pucker, scab more

heavily and almost certainly result in loss of some pigment. It is sufficient to lightly moisturize the skin when it “feels” dry. This will also help prevent itching.

That said — everybody’s skin IS different — using the above as guidelines, experiment and stick with what works best for you.

Clothing: You will also want to be sure to wear loose-fitting clothing that will not rub against the tattoo — especially in the first 2 or 3 days of healing. It is better to keep your freshly tattooed skin exposed to the air during the healing process if at all possible, and if not, to avoid tight clothing that can “stick” to or rub against the tattoo, or clothing that will cause you to perspire where you have been tattooed, etc.

DO NOT PICK at your new Tattoo. Ideally, the skin will form an “onion-peel” like a sunburn. Allow this to slough-off naturally while bathing — and some will dislodge when you gently rub lotion into the tattoo.

KEEP IT CLEAN! Sure, this is stating the obvious — but remember — especially the first day or two, the tattoo is an OPEN WOUND until a skin barrier is formed again. So — avoid things like letting your pets lick the freshly tattooed skin (they will naturally be attracted to the smell). Don’t touch your tattoo yourself if you have not washed your hands. Don’t go out and lean your tattoo on bar and table surfaces, theater seats, handrails, etc. — be conscious that you are still healing.

4. **Moisturizing.** This cannot be over-emphasized — DO NOT OVER-MOISTURIZE. As indicated above, ointments and petroleum-based products used more than after the first day or two retard the healing process and do not let the skin “breathe”. Similarly, slathering your body with lotions on your tattoo continually will also inhibit healing, leading to heavier scabbing and potential loss of color from your new tattoo.

Moisturizing should be “light” — a thin coat in the morning and in the evening of when it feels “dry”. Primarily this will help to prevent itching and help slough off the thin peeling skin that forms over a new tattoo much like a sunburn.

EXCEPTION TO THE RULE — Difficult to heal Areas of the body: Isn’t there always one? On occasion, there may be parts of the body where despite your best efforts; you end up with some heavy “scabbing” — for example, the “crack” where your knee or arm bends. There the constant, repeated movement of the joint simply makes it very hard not to end up with some scabbing during the healing process. Sometimes this can be painful and perhaps even impede proper healing of your new tattoo. On those rare occasions when this happens, we recommend showering to hydrate the area that has scabbed and to apply a heavier and more frequent coating of lotion to help it dislodge the scab. This must be done carefully — picking at the scab and pulling it away before it’s properly loosened will just result in more scabbing and loss of pigment. You may also need to have your tattoo artist go back in and touch-up those areas where the color is lighter after healing — but this is normal for more difficult to heal areas of the body.

5. **Scratching and Picking**— DON'T!! Like a bad sunburn, during the healing process, you may find that your tattoo itches. We've found this tends to be more intense with heavy color-work, or working on a large area at one sitting, and with some colors that seem to be more prone to this than others (reds, purple, and magenta) — but it can be very individualistic. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to deduce that scratching and picking at your tattoo is bad. RESIST – picking at the scab that forms over your tattoo will result in loss of color – and possibly even infection. Even if your tattoo does not “scab” (and hopefully it won't or any scabbing will be minimal — some parts of the body are just going to scab no matter what you do) resist the urge to “peel away” the onion-skin like layer that will form over your tattoo as it heals. This is natural, and it will slough-off in the shower or when you bathe.

6. What to AVOID!

Bathing: During the first week, care should be taken while bathing. DO NOT soak your fresh tattoo. No baths, hot tubs, oceans, etc... The hot water will draw impurities (including tattoo ink pigment) out of your skin and introduce all sorts of new bacteria to your fresh tattoo. Similarly, a hot shower or a steam-room will have the same effect — take a lukewarm shower and minimize your time in the shower with a new tattoo and do not let the shower spray beat on the tattooed skin directly. When you clean your fresh tattoo, make sure to pat dry with a non-cloth material (paper towel or gauze work the best), since things like towels/washcloths harbor more bacteria.

Swimming: Swimming in chlorinated pools and salt-water swimming should be avoided for the first week or so (as should soaking in a Jacuzzi or even your own bathtub at home). While neither pool Chlorine nor salt-water will affect a healed tattoo, both are sources of bacteria and other impurities that could infect your new tattoo. But, after the first week, the surface over the tattoo (absent scabbing) is relatively impervious and it is OK to swim. If, however, you are scabbing, water will tend to swell the scab, loosen it and perhaps cause some loss of pigment. A much greater danger to your tattoo is the prolonged exposure to SUNLIGHT that is associated with swimming.

Steam Rooms/Saunas: Again – NOT a good idea while your new tattoo is healing. Steam and hot water open the pores of the skin and can result in loss of pigment. But once healed – enjoy! In fact, saunas and steam rooms bring out luminosity and color in the colored skin that you won't see elsewhere.

Sunlight/Tanning: Direct sunlight or tanning is without question, the single, WORST thing for any tattoo. While the newer, plasticized inks appear to better at resisting fading, if you spend lots of time in bright sunlight for work or pleasure, over time your tattoo will fade (over a lifetime, not a week). To keep them looking their best, try and keep out of direct and prolonged exposure to sunlight. Just use some common sense. Think of your tattoo as an investment. Only expose your new tattoo to long periods of the sun after it is fully healed and then only with a strong sunscreen applied.

And THINK AHEAD – If you are a sun-worshipper and aren't going to change, then perhaps you should consider more seriously getting black/grey style work which generally withstands sun exposure much better than colorwork. Of course, there's another school of thought — that “faded” tattoos become more a “part of you” and take on a “lived-in” patina — that's a “look” too.

Preparation-H: We have heard stories of tattoo artists that recommend using Preparation-H in the healing of new tattoos. Preparation-H is a product marketed for the relief of hemorrhoid issue in the US. In a word: DON'T! Dr. Jeff Herndon, resident assistant professor at the Department of Medicinal Chemistry at Virginia Commonwealth University's Medical College, says **Preparation-H should *NOT* be used for tattoos:**

“Preparation-H contains shark liver oil (similar to cod liver oil) and it is used primarily as a carrier of the active ingredients and as a protectorate, forming a physical barrier on the skin. While this may be helpful in the healing of hemorrhoids, it provides no benefit and perhaps impeded the healing of new tattoos. Furthermore, while phenylmercuric nitrate (another principal ingredient) may have antiseptic properties (similar to mercurochrome or tincture of iodine; neither of which should be used on fresh tattoos) it possesses very little anti-infection properties when compared to traditional antibacterial agents such as Neosporin and Bacitracin, etc. Its use in such low quantities in Preparation-H is more likely as a preservative. The active ingredient of Preparation-H is the skin respiratory factor and this does nothing to relieve the itching and/or swelling associated with a new tattoo. Not only will it NOT help

your tattoo but it would also probably do more harm than good. The product was developed for hemorrhoid tissue only.”

Tight Clothing: Again, a little bit of extra care in the first 48-72 hours until a good “skin barrier” has formed will promote faster, cleaner healing. It's only common sense that wearing tight-fitting or restrictive clothing that rubs or irritates the freshly tattooed skin is going to lead to scabbing. Additionally, bacteria and other foreign materials embedded in clothing can become a further source of infection for freshly tattooed skin. And remember — THINK AHEAD!! — If you are going to your tattoo artist to have your thigh or hips worked on, don't just think you'll wear your jeans home — bring along a pair of sweatpants or track pants that are loose and breathe that you can wear out of the Tattoo studio.

Pets & Children: Both are a “hotbed” of infectious organisms! If you have dogs or cats (or snakes or lizards . . .), pay particular care not let them lick, “paw” or rub against your fresh tattoo — nor should you touch them and then touch your freshly tattooed skin.