

# Tattoos and body piercing, what are the facts?



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Freak! Weirdo! That was what most people covered in tattoos and body piercing were nicknamed in an era gone by. Today, this widely common phenomenon is widely spread from young adolescence to the older generations and some still carry those nicknames. Tattooing and body piercing has come along way since the time of un-sterilized and unsanitary practices. Body piercing and tattoos are becoming a favorable form of self expression; one should consider the precautions and safety risks before making a hasty decision. Knowing what the processes are for body piercing and tattooing is a big step in understanding what these art forms are. Where the most reputable establishments are is a major key in getting the best results and staying safe when altering the body. Learning how to care for these adornments is a vital necessity in maintaining the integrity of the adornment as well as remaining healthy and infection free. The first question to ask when considering self adornment is, " What is a tattoo or body piercing? " A tattoo and body piercing are forms of skin adornments. (American Academy of Dermatology, 2004) A tattoo is the art of injecting permanent ink into the skin to form a picture or word. A body piercing is the wearing of jewelry through the skin. Tattoos should be performed by a licensed technician using a sterile inking gun to inject the colorful dyes or pigments into the first several layers of epidermis. With every prick of the needle, ink droplets are left behind to create a piece of art. Whereas body piercing is the puncturing of body parts and inserting body jewelry that can be changed or removed. This procedure is usually done by numbing the area first with a local anesthetic to reduce the pain on the participant. The equipment that professional technicians use for tattooing is a small machine with tubes containing dye that pierces the skin repeatedly—an action that

resembles a sewing machine. (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2007) Non-professionals have used needles, safety pins and other sharp instruments pushing India ink, ashes and pen ink through the skin, this practice should be avoided due to unsanitary conditions and the threat of infection or disease are more common. The American Academy of Dermatology (2004) has stated that there are five different types of tattoos. The first type of tattoo is, Traumatic. Traumatic tattoos are unwanted bedding of debris and dirt. Road rash from an accident is one example. The second type of tattoo is Amateur. Amateur tattooing is performed by non-professional individuals that have had little or no formal training. This practice is done by inserting India ink or ashes under the skin using sharp instruments; example would include a jail house tattoo. The third type of tattoo is the professional. The professional tattoo is considered artistry and is among the safest practices for tattooing. Professional tattooists use sterilized guns that inject small amounts of dye under the epidermis creating works of art. Next, there is the medical tattoo. Medical tattoos are used for landmarks in certain treatments like radiation. Medical tattoos are placed by medical physicians. Last, the cosmetic tattoo. Cosmetic tattoos are used for permanent makeup such as eyeliner, lip liner, lipstick, and eyebrows. One cosmetic tattoo that most people are unaware of is to replace the nipple after a breast surgery. The equipment for body piercing varies from a surgical needle to a single use, sterilized piercing gun used for the earlobe. Body piercing is performed by pushing a hollow needle through the body part and inserting a piece of body jewelry. Before technology became so advanced, safety pins, needles and other sharp objects were used for these piercing. This type of unsanitary practice caused many infections and diseases for the person receiving the body jewelry.

Body piercing can be on any part of the body; however the most common areas are: ears, lip, eyebrow, belly button, nose, tongue, nipple and genital areas. Female ear piercing has long been accepted in Western culture, but in the last 25 years male ear piercing and the piercing of body parts has become widespread (American Academy of Dermatology, 2004). Just pick a location and a piercing can be done in that location. Where to find a reputable establishment? Local health departments can give information and licensing requirements on the body piercing or tattoo establishments in their areas along with which establishment is state licensed and inspected. Upon choosing an establishment, questions that should be asked to the technician prior to the body piercing or tattoo might be: Is this location licensed, what is the sterilization practices, is there an autoclave that is used to sterilize, how long has this location been in business, are there references and is there a monitored infection rate? The technician should not be offended in these questions, unless they have something to hide. Only well established practitioners would welcome the questions without dismay. Along with tattoo establishments, body piercing can be done also at many beauty salons as well as mall jewelry stores. These types of retail stores should also be state licensed and inspected as well. Feel free to ask these locations the same questions that would be asked at a tattoo parlor. As professionals, they should not be offended and understand the safety aspect of the situation. The consequences of not using a professional technician or licensed establishment could be tremendous. With the tattoo, there are infections, blood-borne diseases, such as Hepatitis B or HIV, and skin disorders to be aware of. One precaution to be aware of is that tattoos may interfere with medical tests like the MRI due to the iron oxide and heavy metal pigments in

the tattoo ink. Tattoos can be removed by laser surgery, dermabrasion and surgical removal. However, these processes are painful and expensive and do not always work for complete removal. With body piercing, the things to watch for are: blood-borne diseases like Hepatitis B or HIV, oral complications, skin infections such as *Staphylococcus aureus*, (staph infection), bacterial infections called *pseudomonas*, toxic shock syndrome, sepsis, and scars or keloids. Vascular growths, called pyogenic granulomas have also been known to develop due to body piercing. If a vascular growth appears, it must be removed for safety reasons. Embedding may also occur, which is skin that grows over the piercing due to a stud being too tight. The after care for a tattoo or body piercing is necessary to avoid any of the earlier mentioned consequences. According to the Mayo Clinic Staff (2007), an establishment that provides the body piercing or tattoo should give detailed instructions on after care of the body piercing or tattoo. The after care for the tattoo will depend on the type and extent of the tattoo. All tattoos should include the cleaning with soap and water, applying moisturizer regularly and avoiding sun exposure for at least the first few weeks. Tattoos can take up to several days to heal and the scab should not be picked off. For body piercing, the after care will vary depending on location of the piercing. For an oral piercing, use an antibacterial, alcohol free mouthwash up to one minute followed by brushing the teeth with a soft bristled toothbrush after each meal while the piercing is healing. For any type of skin piercing, use a cotton swab to remove any crusting, rinse with warm water and apply a liquid medicated cleanser to the area. The jewelry should be turned from side to side to increase the antibacterial distribution to the puncture site. Avoiding the use of rubbing alcohol or peroxide due to

they dry out the skin. Once the piercing has healed, removal and replacement can be done with ease. The long-term care of a tattoo or body piercing is as important as the initial care. For the tattoo, a moisturizer should be used daily to keep the tattoo healthy looking and from drying out. Sunscreen should be used when the tattoo will be in direct sunlight. With a body piercing, the main objective for long-term care is to make sure the area is kept clean and to use good body jewelry. Jewelry made from brass and nickel tends to cause allergic reactions. Jewelry made from surgical steel, titanium, 14 or 18 karat gold or niobium, are the best choices to make. Tattoos and body piercing, may not be for everyone but to those who choose to have one or more of these body adornments, be wise in choosing a piercing or tattoo, it is a long-term commitment and the youth of today will have to adjust into adult hood and the business world of tomorrow. In conclusion, a tattoo and body piercing are forms of body art and adornment that should be performed by well established technicians that maintain a safe and sterile environment and provide after care instructions to all their patrons. Knowing how the body art is performed is important to having beautiful adornments and avoiding infections and diseases should be a major objective for a tattoo or body piercing. Following the after care routine should be in place and remain long after the body piercing or tattoo has been received. Years of enjoyment from the body piercing or tattoo can be reached if the rules are followed correctly. Have fun, be safe and enjoy those beautiful works of art. Reference List MayoClinic. com. (2007). Tattoos and Piercings: What to Know beforehand. Retrieved January 2008, mayoclinic. com aad. org. (2004). Tattoos, Body Piercings and Other Skin Adornments.

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