Tattoos

Questions to consider before getting body art
Getting a tattoo is a very important decision. You should make sure that this is something that you truly want and will not regret years later. Before getting any form of body art, make sure that you are emotionally and mentally stable. The following are some things that you might want to consider. If you answer no to any of these questions then you may want to give yourself more time to think about your decision.

- Do you like the way body art looks and have no doubts about getting it?
- Do you want body art for personal reasons and not simply because of peer pressure or as a way of rebellion?
- Are you making your decision without the influence of alcohol or other drugs?
- Do you understand the procedures for body art and are you prepared for them? Tattoos are done without anesthesia.
- Do you have an understanding of the risk of certain infections that go along with body art?
- Have you taken proper precautions to ensure your safety? Most states do not regulate these artists.
- Have you received a tetanus immunization in the last ten years?

Questions to ask your tattoo artist
Anyone who is receiving a tattoo has the right to ask about the artist's training and experience. If the artist refuses or seems hesitant to answer your questions, it may be best for you to go somewhere else. Before you get a tattoo you should ask the following questions to ensure your safety:

- What training does the artist have?
- What type of experience does the artist have?
- Does the artist belong to a professional organization or association?
- Is the artist knowledgeable about anatomy and physiology, CPR, prevention of blood-borne diseases, and has he or she attended seminars specifically relating to tattooing safety?
- Does the artist have any samples of previous work, or references whom you may contact?
- Does the artist discuss and provide directions on how to take care of body art?

How to choose the right studio
In order to choose an appropriate studio, you should visit the facility and consider the following:

- Check to see if they have an autoclave. An autoclave is a heat sterilization machine regulated by the Food and Drug Administration. Also check to see if the studio runs regular spore testing in order to make sure that the autoclave is working properly. You may ask to see these records.
- Check to see if the studio reuses needles. Make sure that all needles and inks are in individual packages that are opened while you are present. Make sure that all needles are placed in a sharps container after use.
- Look around the studio to make sure that it is clean, including floors and surfaces.
- The artist should use disposable gloves and change them each time he/she touches a non-sterile surface.
- Ask if the studio provides specific instructions for taking care of your body art.
- Ask to see where the tattooing takes place.
- Ask how the studio provides privacy for clients getting a tattoo in an area that they do not wish to have exposed.
- Check to see if they have posted a Certification of Board of Health approval.

Your rights
Please remember that everyone who receives a tattoo has the following rights. You have the right to:

- Receive service in a clean, open environment by a careful artist wearing a fresh pair of disposable gloves.
- Have a professional and knowledgeable artist who will make his/her client’s experience as pleasant as possible.
- Have brand new, sterilized needles that will be placed in a sharps container immediately after they have been used for the procedure.
- Be fully informed about proper aftercare.

**Tattoo aftercare**
- Wash the tattoo with warm water and antibacterial soap after 3 or 4 hours and as often as you can for the rest of the day.
- At the end of the third day begin to moisturize the tattoo by lightly applying lotion to it. Ask your artist what kind of lotion he/she suggests to clients.
- Apply the lotion once a day for 2 – 3 weeks, or until the tattoo is completely healed.
- Avoid the sun and do not use tanning beds. Keep in mind that sunlight will fade a tattoo over time.
- Do not scratch or pick at scabs that form after a tattoo. This can increase the chance of infection, distort the art and postpone the healing process.

**What are the risks?**
Since tattooing and piercing regulations are not always properly enforced, some artists do not follow simple health rules that are designed to prevent infection. As a result, there is always a risk of some type of infection when getting a tattoo. The following are some serious infections that are associated with tattooing and piercing.

- Allergic reactions to dyes used in tattoos
- Hepatitis B
- Hepatitis C
- HIV
- Tetanus
- Tuberculosis
- Methicillin-resistant staph aureus (per CDC)
- Exposure to mercuric sulfide (also known as cinnabar), a red pigment (per CDC)
- Leprosy (per CDC)
- Endocarditis

**Signs of infection**
- Redness or excessive swelling in the area of the tattoo after the first 48 hours
- Throbbing pain or tenderness in the area of the tattoo after the first 48 hours
- Red streaks in the skin around the wound or progressing away from the tattoo
- Pus or watery discharge collected beneath the skin or draining from the tattoo
- Tender lumps or swelling in our armpit, groin or neck
- Foul odor from the area of the tattoo
- Generalized chill or fever

If you notice any of these signs when examining your tattoo, or have any concerns, see a doctor immediately.

**For more information**
If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact the following sources:

- The Alliance of Professional Tattooists Web site, search for tattoos
- Your local public health department
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration
- Centers for Diseases Control (CDC) Web site, search for tattoos

If you are a registered University of Illinois student and you have questions or concerns, or need to make an appointment, please call: **Dial-A-Nurse at 333-2700**

If you are concerned about any difference in your treatment plan and the information in this handout, you are advised to contact your health care provider.

Visit the McKinley Health Center Web site at: **http://www.mckinley.illinois.edu**

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