

Tattoos and Permanent Make-up

Before getting a tattoo or permanent make-up, here is what you should know. A tattoo is a mark or design on the skin. A permanent tattoo is meant to last forever. It is made with a needle and colored ink. The needle puts the ink into the skin. Some of these colors are also used in printing or painting cars and have not been tested for safety. In fact, no colors are approved by FDA for injecting into the skin. Allergic reactions have been reported from individuals who have received either temporary or permanent tattoos.

Types of tattoos

There are many different kinds of tattoos. For example:

- **Permanent tattoos**—A needle is used to insert colored ink into the skin.
- **Permanent make-up**—This is a permanent tattoo that looks like make-up, such as eyebrow pencil, lip liner, eyeliner or blush.
- **Henna (mehndi) tattoos**—A natural plant dye called henna or mehndi is used to stain the skin. This kind of tattoo does not use needles. The color lasts 2 to 3 weeks. Henna is only approved by FDA for use as a hair dye. It is not approved for use on the skin.
- **“Sticker” type temporary tattoos**—The tattoo design is on a piece of coated paper. It is put on the skin with water or may be rubbed off onto the skin.

Temporary tattoos last only a few days. They must contain only colors permitted for use in cosmetics applied to the skin.

Why would someone want a tattoo or permanent make-up?

- They want to restore a natural look to the face or breast, especially after surgery.
- They have trouble putting on make-up as a result of a medical condition.
- They have lost their eyebrows.
- They find it appealing.
- Cultural or societal influences.

What are the risks?

- **Infection**—Dirty needles can pass infections from one person to another person. These can be serious like hepatitis and HIV.
- You might be allergic to something used in your tattoo. This is rare, but can cause serious problems. In one case, involving one manufacturer, more than 150 reports of bad reactions to certain shades of permanent make-up inks were reported to FDA. Some women were permanently disfigured. The company recalled many of its inks.
- Lumps or bumps may form around the tattoo color.



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- People may have swelling or burning in the tattoo when they have magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). This happens rarely and does not last very long.

What if I don't like my tattoo?

- You may not like your tattoo even if it was done well. Not liking the tattoo is a common reason for having one removed.
- If you decide you want to get rid of a tattoo, it usually takes many treatments and costs a lot of money.
- Scars may form when getting or removing a tattoo.

Remember...

Think very carefully before getting a tattoo. Most tattoos are permanent. Removing tattoos and permanent make-up can be hard and can cost a lot of money. Sometimes, it cannot be done. It often means surgery and scarring.

How can I get rid of a tattoo?

Tattoo removal should be done by a doctor or clinic and not by a tattoo parlor. There are several ways to try to remove a tattoo, and they don't always work. It can cost a lot of money and you may need a lot of treatment.

Talk to your doctor or other health care provider to learn the best way to remove your tattoo.

Does the FDA control tattoos?

Most states, cities, or towns oversee tattooing or permanent make-up practices, such as using clean equipment. Tattoo inks themselves are cosmetics and by federal law, the colors used in them must be shown to be safe. However, none is approved and the inks used in tattooing have not been strictly regulated by the FDA.

The FDA is trying to find out why some women had bad reactions to certain permanent make-up inks. When more is known, FDA will decide what action to take to make tattooing safer.

How should I report a bad reaction or report a complaint?

You can report it to your FDA district office, listed in the blue pages of your phone book, or FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (CFSAN) Adverse Events Reporting System (CAERS) in one of the following ways:

- By phone at 1-800-FDA-1088
- By email at CAERS@cfsan.fda.gov

FDA Office of Women's Health <http://www.fda.gov/womens>

To Learn More:

FDA Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition
<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov>