

TATTOO REMOVAL INFORMATION

Since their original introduction in 1969 many different lasers have been used for medical tattoo removal, and while each laser has its own unique advantages and disadvantages, *no one laser can remove all types of inks and pigments in all tattoos.* Dr Salmon has researched many lasers and feels that at this time Q-switched lasers, those capable of producing a brief, powerful pulse of energy, are the ones most effective for tattoo removal. Depending on the circumstances of each patient, the nurse will choose the specific combination of laser wave-length, powers, spot sizes, etc that she feels will work best for your tattoo.

Ideally, laser tattoo removal will remove all evidence of the tattoo colour and image, leaving the skin as it was before the tattoo was placed, i.e. "normal", with no mark whatsoever. While we always strive for this outcome, and use the most advanced laser technology available to achieve an optimal result, this may not occur.

After the tattoo is placed some mild scar can form in the skin. Also, any previous attempts of tattoo removal can leave marking in the skin, and years of sun exposure on the tattooed skin may alter the skin's appearance. These changes may not be apparent while the colour of the tattoo is still present, but once the tattoo colour is gone, some of these minor variations in texture, colour, scaliness, etc can become more noticeable and make the tattooed area appear different than the surrounding skin. In general, after the final laser procedure is completed, the treated skin looks much like the normal skin surrounding the spot.

We can only **ESTIMATE** the number of treatments it will take to completely remove the tattoo. This is because:

1. The wide variation of inks and pigmented materials used for tattooing
2. The inks themselves are made up of a combination of different chemical substances
3. The amount of ink placed in the tattoo, as well as the depth of pigment placement varies from one tattoo to another
4. The ability of your white blood cells to "gobble up and drag away" different pigment particles varies
5. Other unknown factors

As a result of these many issues we cannot be absolutely certain how your particular tattoo will respond. Most "amateur or home-made" tattoos will generally require about 5-7 laser treatments. "Professional" tattoos and those done with harder inks, tend to be more variable in response, and average about 8-12 laser treatments. Some stubborn tattoo inks may require even more treatments.

While the most noticeable lightening of the tattoo usually occurs after the first treatment, continued lightening occurs with each subsequent treatment, although it may not be as easily seen. *Before and after photos have been taken of thousands of patients demonstrating that every patient will fade to some degree after every treatment.*

Before starting each treatment session, we often compare the tattoo with the original photos (taken before the first treatment) to assess the amount of colour that has already been removed. With this information we can evaluate your progress and discuss the need for continued treatment. The decision to continue is always made jointly and made with a clear understanding of potential outcomes.

Given enough time, treatment and effort, virtually all the tattoo ink will eventually disappear.

With each treatment some redness, bruising, swelling, blistering and crusting is common, but wound infection is rare. Irregular pigmentation and mild texture changes can occur as a result of laser changes can occur as a result of laser treatment, but these changes usually return back to "normal" over a few months. Rarely these changes are permanent.

True scarring with the newest, more advanced lasers is rare.

We advise patients to protect the wound as you would any other minor burn for a few days. A dressing may help to protect the area and minimize further injury. Cold compresses and over the counter analgesics (paracetamol), can be taken for minor discomfort during the first few days. Most patients are able to resume normal activity and work the same day. Showering and bathing are usually not a problem, but sun exposure should be avoided in the treated area.

It is very important to follow our instructions carefully especially regarding the use of any medications or specific wound care that may be recommended.

Complications and Adverse Effects

These complications and adverse effects can occur:

- Scarring, keloid formation and indentation of the tissue
- Postoperative erythema, oedema and pain
- Hypopigmentation or hyperpigmentation
- Pseudofolliculitis barbae

These complications and risks that exist for conventional or traditional surgery also exist for laser surgery. These include, but are not limited to the following:

- Allergic reaction to medication
- Arrhythmia
- Pain
- Ulceration
- Fever
- Delayed healing.

TATTOO REMOVAL AFTERCARE

There is immediate whitening of the treated area which lasts for several minutes. This may be followed by pain, heat, redness and swelling in the treated area. The treated area will have dressing applied.

The pain can be managed by the use of a cool compresses and Paracetamol (avoid aspirin as this will increase bruising post treatment) for 24 hours after the laser treatment. We recommend the hourly application of QV Rescue Gel. Keep area covered between applications for 24hours. Avoid sun exposure to area throughout treatment period and for six months post completion. Avoid strenuous exercise or contact sports for 24hrs post treatment.

An Aftercare pack containing QV Rescue Gel and Neutrogena Helioplex sunscreen can be purchased from the clinic for \$35.

Pin point bleeding may occur, this will resolve, and may last for 1-2 weeks. The laser treatment rarely creates a superficial burn wound. Occasionally patients may develop blisters, crusts or scabs within 24-72 hours which may last for 1-2 weeks.

In the rare instance where the skin does crust the following needs to be followed twice daily:

- 1) Wash your hands
- 2) Clean wound with a salt water solution (1 teaspoon of salt into 1 cup of cool boiled water). Using a cotton bud, gently tease away any crusts/ scabs. **DO NOT PICK AT THE SCAB AS THIS MAY RESULT IN SCARRING.**
- 3) Pat dry with a tissue
- 4) Apply a thin smear of Vaseline. There is no need to cover the wound unless the Vaseline will soil your clothing
- 5) Do not apply makeup or medicated creams including herbal preparations whilst skin is broken.
- 6) Avoid sun exposure until healed and then wear a sunscreen for six months.
- 7) Loss of pigment in the area (usually temporary) is common.
- 8) Complete healing is usually seen by 6-8 weeks.

NOTIFY THE SURGERY SHOULD ANY OF THE FOLLOWING OCCUR:

- 1) The area has a purulent (pus) discharge.
- 2) Increasing redness around area.
- 3) Increasing discomfort
- 4) Bleeding
- 5) Elevated temperature