



EUROPEAN ACADEMY OF
DERMATOLOGY AND VENEREOLOGY

Information Leaflet for Patients

TATTOO AFTERCARE

The aim of this leaflet:

This leaflet is designed to help you understand more about tattoo aftercare. It tells you what's important to do and to avoid, how to understand the difference between normal and abnormal wound healing and what to do when a problem occurs.

TATTOO AFTERCARE

How to treat a fresh tattoo?

When a tattoo is completed in hygienic circumstances on clean and healthy skin it usually heals without complications. The objective of good aftercare is to rapidly restore the protective skin barrier, to avoid infection, and for the tattoo to look good and the skin appear healthy.

There is a large variety of aftercare instructions on the internet and each tattooist has preferences usually depending on experience. Gold standard does not exist, but basic principles of good hygiene are essential.

What is the source of the infection?

1. Hygiene:

- Limit touching the fresh tattoo.
- Clean hands are crucial to avoid infection.
- Wash your hands before touching a fresh tattoo.
- Ensure clothing that comes into contact with a fresh tattoo and during the healing period is clean.
- Showering is fine. Use plenty of water and a small amount of soap or soap substitutes. Rinse thoroughly.
- Dab the tattoo dry with a fresh clean towel or kitchen paper or allow the tattoo to air dry. Do not wipe or rub dry.
- Do not pick crusts or loose skin during the healing period and avoid scratching.

2. Wound care

Follow the wound care advice until healing is complete and use only appropriate aftercare materials, according to the instructions of your professional tattooist.

Some tattooists will apply a plastic foil, polyurethane film bandage or second-skin like bandage that will be used until full healing of the tattoo.

- *The foil or bandage can remain on the wound for 24 hours or even for several days as long as it feels comfortable without leakage of wound fluid. The wound will then heal without forming a scab.*
- *When leakage of wound fluid occurs, the bandage must be changed.*

- *The wound can be washed, dried and a new bandage can be applied for a few more days until it peels off spontaneously.*
- *When the wound is healed, do not recover with a bandage.*

Another treatment option is frequent application of hypoallergenic aftercare ointment.

- *Apply a light film of the ointment two or three times daily for 2 or 3 days.*
- *Rinse with water or shower between bandage changes.*
- *Cover the tattoo with a new non-adhesive dressing. A soft scab will start to cover the tattoo after a few days.*
- *When the tattoo stops weeping, bandages are unnecessary.*
- *Continue keeping the tattoo surface moist by using an aftercare hypoallergenic emollient until the scab is completely gone.*

When the tattoo is completely healed, it is recommended to use an unperfumed emollient several times a day for weeks to restore the normal appearance of the skin. It will prevent the tattoo from drying and itching.

Disinfectants and antibiotic creams are not needed during tattoo healing. They should only be used in case of infection after medical evaluation.

Which activities must be avoided during the healing period?

- Bathing, swimming and sauna, until the tattoo is completely healed. Showering is fine.

- Activities and clothing which can cause irritation through friction and sweating.
- Long-haul flight just after tattooing. In case of large tattoos especially, extensive swelling can cause discomfort.
- Sun-exposure for several months because this can lead to abnormal pigmentation. Sunscreens with a high protection factor can be used after complete healing of the tattoo if sun-exposure cannot be avoided. Clothing is the best protection.

How can you recognize normal versus abnormal signs of wound healing?

Here you can find a description of normal healing and signs of infection and allergy and what to do if infection or allergy is suspected.

Normal signs

- The tattoo will be sensitive and warm to the touch for several hours or days. The superficial layers of the tattooed skin will peel away during the first weeks.
- Weeping (clear or pink fluid mixed with tattoo ink) is normal in the first days. In case of excessive weeping, the bandage will get saturated and start to leak. It is recommended to change the dressing more frequently then.
- Mild redness in the tattooed area is a normal phenomenon but should decrease rapidly in the next few days.
- Mild swelling is normal in the first hours or days but will decrease every day.
- A feverish feeling can occur in the first 12 hours, especially when large areas have been tattooed. This should disappear the next day; if not, monitor closely for infection.

Abnormal Signs

How can you recognize signs of infection?

See also leaflet **Tattoo infection**.

- Increasing weeping.
- Discharge of yellowish to green sticky fluid.
- Unpleasant/foul smell.
- Increasing painful redness, spreading around the tattooed area.
- Increasing pain, throbbing and burning in and around the tattooed area.

The following alarm signs can indicate a severe infection which can be associated with septicemia (“blood poisoning”) and require immediate medical attention.

- When infection is spreading over the skin red lines can appear, tracking from a recent tattoo over the tattooed limb or on the body.
- High fever or persisting fever and flu-like symptoms.

What to do in case of infection after the procedure?

Seek medical care promptly.

How to recognize signs of allergy?

People with pre-existing allergy for certain products (e.g. nickel, preservatives, antiseptics, lanoline) can develop eczema in the tattooed area. Sometimes this reaction can be spreading over the body. An allergic reaction to aftercare products will occur after hours to days and presents as a rash with redness, sometimes small blisters and weeping, clear as water. This reaction is usually restricted to the tattooed area and its surroundings. Severe allergic reactions can manifest with redness and bumps all-over the body. Itching is prominent.

What to do in case of allergy in the first days after the procedure?

Stop the use of all aftercare products.

Who should you contact when you experience a complication in a tattoo?

When you experience a medical problem contact a physician.

Always inform the tattooist. The tattooist is advised to keep records of any action taken. The tattooist can check the ICF (informed consent form) to identify the materials which have been used for tattooing. This can be helpful to trace the source of the infection or to identify culprit materials, including inks in case of allergy.

