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Tattoos Are Now Reversible

IT SEEMED LIKE A GOOD IDEA AT THE TIME...NOT!!!
FORTUNATELY, TATTOOS ARE NOW REVERSIBLE

By David J. Goldberg, M.D.

What's wrong? The tattoo that seemed like such a good idea a few years ago doesn't look so hot now? It declares his love for Jill when he says his heart belongs to you?

Don't despair: Several sessions of simple skin laser surgery should solve your problem.

Tattoos can be lightened, often removed, by laser surgery, without the scarring and lengthy recovery common in former tattoo-removal procedures.

Lasers produce a concentrated beam of one or more specific wavelengths of light. The light penetrates the outer layers of skin in short, intense pulses, and is absorbed by the ink in the tattoo. The procedure either lightens the color or erases it entirely.

If you are considering having a tattoo removed by laser, make sure that your expectations are realistic.

Whether or not the tattoo disappears entirely often depends upon the colors of ink used in the procedure. Yellow can be lightened, but rarely disappears.

Inks in the red, black, green or blue color families respond best to laser treatment.

Because most of the tattoos we see today are made up of multiple ink colors, it usually takes more than one laser to remove a tattoo effectively.

The most commonly used tattoo lasers are the Q-switched Nd:YAG laser (best for red, purple, orange and black colors) and the Q-switched ruby laser (best for blue and green tones).

It takes five or more sessions to lighten or erase most tattoos.

The laser works by eating through layers of dense pigment. The thicker the pigment, the greater the number of sessions required. Therefore, professional tattoos with more detail and colors usually require more treatments than tattoos applied by amateurs do. On the other hand, the body's natural immune system works to remove the pigment, so older tattoos are often easier to remove than newer ones.

The use of laser surgery to remove tattoos is a great improvement over former alternatives: dermabrasion and excision. These techniques often resulted in excessive scarring and required extensive recovery time.

Dermabrasion involved sanding away both the surface and middle layers of skin. Excision involved removing the tattoo with a scalpel and closing the wound with stitches.

Tattoos have a long tradition. Throughout history they have served many purposes, marking social status, separating royalty from slaves, the faithful from the heretic. Today, tattoos are frequently used as a sign of allegiance to a loved one, a gang, even to a political cause.

Today, though, laser surgery makes tattoos reversible.

If you're looking for the right doctor to perform the procedure, make sure to ask:

... How many tattoos has your doctor removed?

... How many times has the doctor removed tattoos using the lasers that will be used for your procedure?

... How many lasers are there in the doctor's office?

Don't forget: It takes different lasers to tackle different colors, so no single laser can get the job done.

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