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MANAGING WELLNESS

THE RISKS OF LIP TATTOOS: WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

- Lips are one of the most painful areas to have tattooed
- The risk of infection from lip tattoos is high because the oral environment is swarming with bacteria
- All tattoos should be done by a professional, licensed tattoo artist who uses sterile equipment



Posted by [DONNA PLEIS](#) April 9, 2018

Tattoos have been a popular form of body art for many years. In fact, Statistic Brain reports that [45 million Americans](#) have at least one tattoo somewhere on their body.

The latest tattoo trend to explode in popularity is *lip tattoos*. Although any tattoo procedure can be risky, if you're thinking about getting one on or inside of your lip, you might want to first investigate the specific risks of lip tattoos before going under the needle.

Here are some important things to keep in mind when considering inner-lip and lip-liner tattoos.

Inner-Lip Tattoos

Most people requesting lip tattoos want something small—like a symbol, number sequence or short word—tattooed on their inner lip, tattoo shop manager Eric Gaudet told the Canadian Press. And while his shop does lip tattoos, they actually [try to talk people out of them](#) for the following reasons:

- Lips are one of the most painful areas to have tattooed.
- The client has to hold their lower lip open and keep it *perfectly still* during the tattooing process.
- Lip tattoos may last only weeks or months because of the quick cell turnover in the oral environment.
- Frequent touch-ups are required.

Even though many consider lip tattoos to be fairly safe, here's why dermatologist Dr. Julia Carroll told the Canadian Press she has reservations about them:

- It's common to experience lots of pain and swelling after the procedure.
- The risk of infection is high because the mouth harbors hundreds of kinds of bacteria.
- Every touch-up brings the added risk of infection.
- Eating foods with high acid content, like vinegar, tomatoes and citrus fruits, can cause irritation for a time after the procedure.
- An allergic reaction to the tattoo ink can cause swelling or painful lumps of scar tissue to appear under the skin, which are difficult to remove and can resemble [oral cancer](#).

Lip-Liner Tattoos

Not long ago, it was somewhat common for people to get their eyebrows, eyelids and lips lined with tattoo ink. But since long-lasting inks tend to look unnatural, permanent makeup artists began to prefer to use pigment. When the border of the lip is lined one or two shades darker than the natural lip color, the

person's lips appear fuller without resorting to temporary fillers, such as Botox injections. Here are some pros and cons of [lip pigmentation](#), according to makeup artist Amy Kernahan:

- Pigments give a natural, powdery finish, but since lips naturally exfoliate, the effects only last about 12 to 18 months.
- Lips are vascular and sensitive, making this a painful procedure —but there is the option of an anesthetic to block the pain.
- Healing time is about 10 days, and the lips will likely appear dry and chapped during that time.
- People who are susceptible to [cold sores](#) should take preventive medication since the needle stimulation can cause an outbreak and affect results.
- Not every skin tone responds well; for example, some darker skin tones can undergo hyperpigmentation and become too dark.
- While lip tattoos last longer than temporary fillers, they are typically more expensive.

Long-Term Effects

As reported by Chemical & Engineering News, many individuals don't realize that the pigments [found in tattoo inks](#) "can be repurposed from the textile, plastics, or car paint industry." According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the [long-term effects](#) of the pigments (and possible contaminants) in various tattoo inks are still being determined.

The FDA has received reports of bad reactions to tattoo ink occurring "right after tattooing and even years later," the source notes. Localized bacterial infections or blood-borne infections (like hepatitis B and C) can be the result of non-sterile needles, unclean tattooing practices or contaminated ink.

If you should decide that the artistic outcome outweighs the aforementioned risks of lip tattoos, just be sure you have your procedure done at a professional tattoo parlor by a state-licensed artist. And don't be shy about asking them to explain their sterile techniques—and show you the equipment in its sterile package. You will have fewer complications if you think *before* you ink.

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