

# Thinking Ink?

By Suze Hargraves

I'm a fan of ink. I'm talking about tattoos. I've got several and I'm constantly looking for or trying to create a new one. I know not everyone will agree with me, but I'm not alone in my love of tattoos. WebMd reports that 25% of 18- to 30-year-olds have a tattoo and that percent is predicted to rise to 40% in a few years. They add that 65% of people with tattoos are women.

Tattooing, although its popularity rises and falls on occasion, is not a fad. It's been around for centuries. In 1991, the "Iceman" was discovered by two hikers in the Otzal region of the Alps. Named Oetzi, he was carbon dated at about 5,300 years old. Researches revealed that he had 57 tattoos that coincide with Chinese acupuncture meridians. They found soot, quartz, and a variety of purple garnet in the tattoos. This is, of course, a far cry from the tattoos of today.

Tattooing today is serious business. Artists understand that, through their craft, they risk exposure to any number of blood borne diseases such as HIV or hepatitis C. Their clients have those same concerns and more such as staph infections, MRSA (Methicillin resistant Staphylococcus aureus) and more. Proper precautions must be taken. WebMd gives us these things to look for when choosing a tattoo establishment:

**Who does the tattooing?** Go to a reputable tattooing studio that employs only properly trained employees.

(Note: The State of New Hampshire requires licensing for tattoo artists. Look for a current license.)

**Does the tattoo artist wear gloves?** Make sure the tattoo artist washes his or her hands and wears a fresh pair of protective gloves for each procedure.

**Does the tattoo artist use proper equipment?** Make sure the tattoo artist removes a needle and tubes from sealed packages before your procedure begins. Any pigments, trays and containers should be unused as well.

**Does the tattoo artist sterilize non-disposable equipment?** Make sure the tattoo artist uses a heat sterilization machine (autoclave) to sterilize all non-disposable equipment after each customer.

There are a few things that can go wrong even if your artist does everything perfectly. Because a tattoo pierces the skin, it is prone to infection. Allergic reactions are also possible. Follow your artists post-tattoo care instructions to the letter. If you develop a rash, swelling or redness around a new tattoo see your health care provider.

If you're considering a tattoo you need to be aware of some basics. First and foremost never, ever get a tattoo when you've been drinking or are under the influence of anything, including peers. You need a clear head to make the choice that's right for you. Do not get inked when you're sick. Let the artist know when you make the appointment if you are taking any over-the-counter, street or prescription drugs as some can thin the blood or cause changes to the texture of your skin. If you have a chronic health condition, especially diabetes, ask your health care provider if you are a good candidate for ink. Many health conditions and the prescriptions associated with them can inhibit or extend healing time. Last but not least never, under any circumstances, allow yourself to be tattooed by an amateur. Be sure your choice to ink is compatible with your lifestyle and profession. Choose your art carefully and choose your artist even more carefully. Tattoos can be removed but it's an expensive and often painful process.

Tattooing is not for everyone and I doubt there will ever be a time when everyone approves of tattoos. If you make the choice to ink, respect the art by making intelligent and meaningful choices about your ink. With the right precautions and some forethought your tattoos will be a source of pride for the rest of your life.