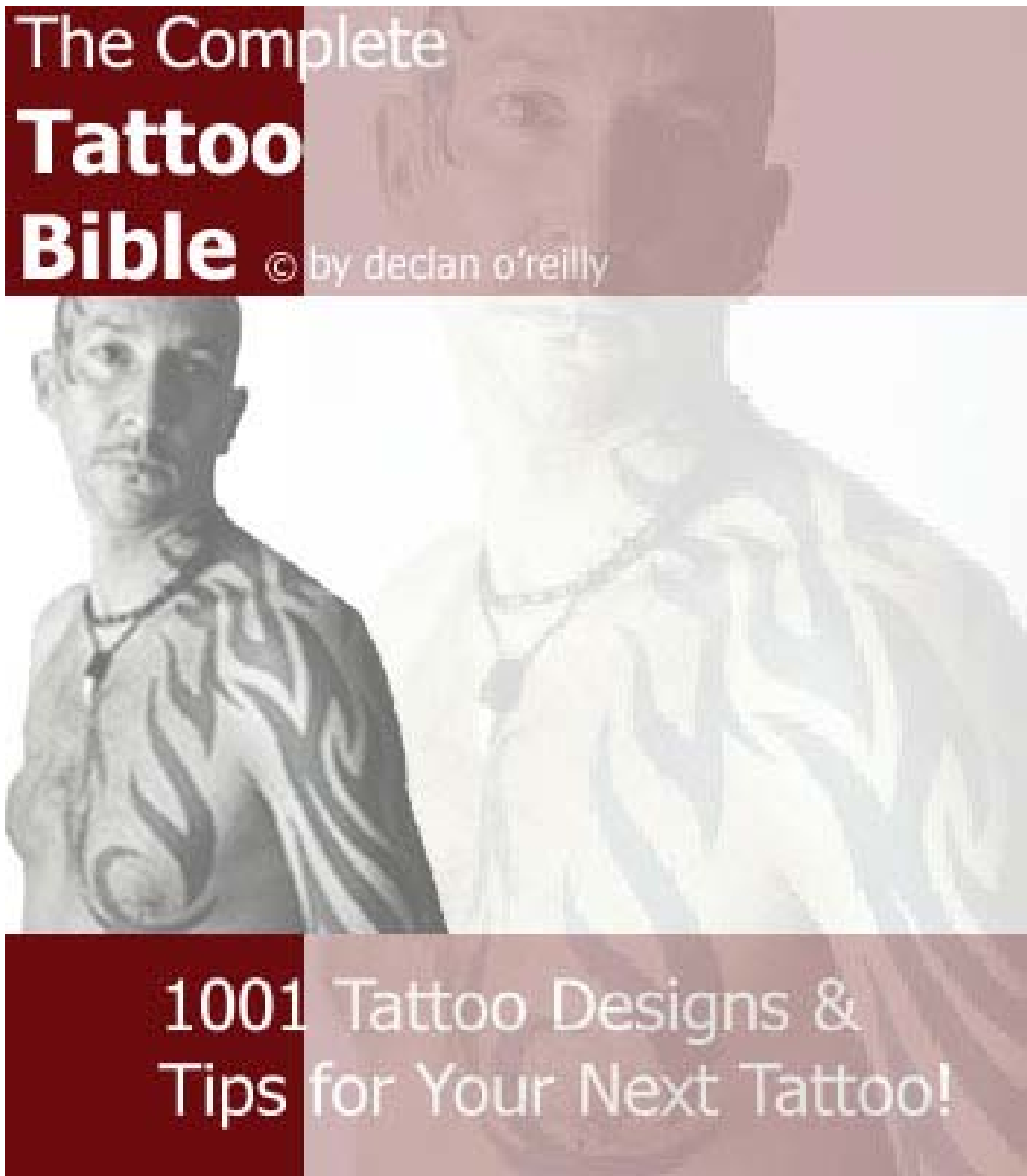


Version

1

The background of the entire page is a faded, high-contrast photograph of two men. The man on the left is shown from the chest up, facing forward, with a large, dark, flame-like tattoo on his right chest and shoulder. The man on the right is shown from the chest up, facing slightly to the right, with a large, dark, flame-like tattoo on his left chest and shoulder. Both men are wearing dark necklaces.

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The Facts: What You Should Know About Tattoos...

The following pages contain the combined wisdom of many experts within the tattooing world. So why not print 'em off, grab your favorite drink and read it offline. Regardless of whether you are a seasoned tattoo enthusiast or a tattoo virgin you are guaranteed to find the following pages full of valuable insights and expertise!

While tattoos have been around for thousands of years, they are currently experiencing an almost unprecedented popularity in the around the world even in countries such as Iran! However, the general population of developed countries still regards them with some disdain, especially against those who have A LOT of any type of body art. The purpose of this guide is NOT to raise these issues or to change such views, but to educate those who are interested in learning more about tattoos. Regardless of motive, tattooing is a very personal choice. This information should help you make a wiser decision about getting inked, since the reversing process is not easy.

Getting a tattoo is possibly one of the most personal and permanent decisions you are likely to make. It is not a decision that should be made on a whim. It's best to be as honest with yourself as possible about WHAT type of tattoo design you want and more importantly WHY you want to get it.

Educating yourself about the different styles of tattoos will help. Unless you have a definite tattoo design imprinted into your brain it is recommended that you expose yourself to as many different styles and tattoo designs before you make a commitment to be inked. This is where this e-book will come in handy.

The images in the e-book are for educational purposes and are NOT intended to be copied straight onto your skin. Some tattoo artists may be insulted if you waltz into their studio and ask to have an image of another person's tattoo copied. But then other tattoo artists will tell you that nearly all tattoo art is derivative. One just needs to look at any major style of tattoo from Celtic to Tribal to see how it is derived from earlier works of art and body adornment.

So even before you commit to a tattoo you should check out the tattoo artist's work. Ask to see a portfolio of their customized work NOT their 'bread and butter' tattoo designs. If there is a tattoo design that matches the style you have in mind or 'resonates' with you then ask the artist how the design came about, in other words was it designed 'freestyle' by the artist or copied from a picture.

You basically want to find out if the artist is happy doing customized work or prefers to work off an image such as a flash design or from a tattoo magazine or website. A quick survey of tattoo artists would suggest that most of them do not like to do customized work too often because it is HARD work!

Obviously custom work is much more expensive because it takes that much longer for the tattoos artist to sit down and physically design the tattoo. As a result the artist will most likely want to see some payment up front unless of course they know and trust you. :-)

This is why it helps if you have a style of existing image you want customized. It makes the artist's job so much easier if you have a clear idea of what you want rather than saying you want a wolf in snow howling at a tribal moon! Any tattoo artist worth his salt will be able to modify a tattoo design to make it unique to you.

But before you even get to this stage I recommend that you VISUALIZE the kind of tattoo you want. At this stage you don't have to be absolutely clear on the overall design. The idea is to just get 'a feeling' about what you want to project when others see your tattoo.

Think deeply on this one because this is probably the number one reason why so many people get tattoos that they end up REGRETTING. Prepare NOW instead of repairing LATER! I speak from experience on this as I had a tattoo I put little thought into being covered up.

Try to imagine how your new tattoo is going to make you feel. It helps if the tattoo has a deeper meaning or special significance rather than merely to look good on your skin. The most enduring tattoos are the one with meaning for the person with them. Choose something that has lasting appeal.

Chances are that if you get a tattoo from a recent film or a cartoon character you will look back in less than five years and want it off. So it's wise to hold off getting a tattoo of the main character of your favorite science fiction thriller or a picture of Marge Simpson on your forearms!

Look around your life and ask yourself what is important for you. Not just for this week, month or even year. What 'speaks' to you? An example of this is people who get tattoos of certain birds or animals because they believe that they are imbued with certain powers such strength or healing abilities. Take a look at Tattoo Symbols for more ideas and meanings.

The bottom line is that you want to get a tattoo that you are 100% certain of not because it is trendy at the time. What you don't want is to spend hundreds of dollars on a tattoo that you will regret. If you are determined to get a customized tattoo make the artist work for their money and don't be tempted to get a cheap tattoo for the sake of it!

Good tattoos are NOT cheap. Cheap tattoos are NOT good!

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Getting a Tattoo - Does it Hurt?

This is the first question in this FAQ because it's usually the first question that people ask. The answer is yes. Having needles pierce your skin does hurt. But what you really want to know is, "How MUCH does it hurt, and can I handle it?"

It's not nearly as bad as what you might imagine. The pain comes from the cluster of needles on the tattooing machine piercing your skin very rapidly. This sensation, however, doesn't feel like the poking pain of an injection--it's more of a constant vibration. You will be amazed at how quickly your body releases endorphins, (pain killers), which dulls the pain significantly.

The pain will also vary according to where on your body you get worked on. Skin right above bones (collarbone, anklebone, etc.) tends to be more painful than other areas. In addition, certain types of needles seem to hurt more than others. I personally think the needles used for outlining produce a sharper, more noticeable pain, while the needles used for shading seem to be much more like an electrical buzz (nearly painless). Remember, you are volunteering for the experience. The amount of pain will depend on your psychological attitude.

NOTE: Do not drink alcohol or take illegal drugs for pain relief purposes prior to your tattoo sessions. Both aspirin and alcohol thin your blood and promote excessive bleeding. Aspirin also decreases the clotting of blood, which will slow down your healing as well. In addition, artists do not appreciate dealing with drunks and is illegal in many states.

What about Anesthetics?

Some people say that taking a couple of over-the-counter analgesics before tattooing can take the edge off the pain. Acetaminophen, commonly sold under the brand name 'Tylenol' is generally recommended, but not aspirin, ibuprofen, or other NSAIDs, as they tend to inhibit clotting. In short, you may find yourself bleeding like the proverbial stuck pig.

There are actually topical anaesthetics available, even in the stick-up-its-butt U.S. For instance, Bactine contains some lidocaine, and it is possible to buy benzocaine preparations over the counter. The drawback of these is that they do not work on unbroken skin, but if they are applied after the first pass with the needle, they can make a tremendous difference. EMLA is reputed to be much better, and will work on unbroken skin, but it is not generally available in the U.S.

Should I Get a Tattoo?

Your reading of this may mean you're already interested in getting a tattoo, or may know someone who is. In a survey of 163 tattooed men and women, a third of them had regretted their tattoos! While most of this FAQ discusses the process once you've decided to get one, let's pause for a moment.

Why Do I Want One?

People get tattoos for different reasons.

- Is it to please your partner?

- Is it because you want to belong to a group that has tattoos?
- Do you identify with a certain subculture known for tattoos?
- Do you want to show your independence, individuality or uniqueness?

These are all valid reasons, and why many people get tattooed. However, because of the permanency of your tattoo, try to look at yourself in five, 10, or even 20 years. What will you be doing at that time? You might be a free-spirited college student now, and a web of vines on your wrist would look really lovely. However, are you planning to work in a very conservative field after you graduate? Will others look at your tattoo in a bad way? Will you have to hide it with long sleeve shirts? Are you willing to wear long sleeve shirts if the environment is negative?

Do you want a tattoo of a tiger because your partner's nickname is "Tiger," and you love the way s/he scratches your skin? Do you think you'll be with this person in five years? If not, how will you look at that tattoo...with fond memories, symbolizing a special period in your life? Or a shameful or painful reminder of somebody who hurt you and didn't care for you?

You're a headbanger (or a nose-smasher, ear-bopper or whatever) and you REALLY want a tattoo all over your arms but you can't afford a professional artist so you get your friend with the mail-order tattooing machine to do those designs for you? Or perhaps you get spider webs tattooed all over your hands (or your face, which has happened) because you want to be "different" in school. What if you decide to "straighten out" and get a real job; train as a chef or something, and then no restaurant hires you?

GETTING IT REMOVED is NOT easy, and is NOT cheap. Expect to pay \$1,000 to remove even a fairly small-sized tattoo if you're looking at laser surgery. Expect to have a noticeable ugly scar if you go with a non-laser technique. Expect to pay for every penny out of your own pocket because health insurance companies will not pay for tattoo removal. There may not be a laser surgery specialist in your area. Then think of all those laser-surgery doctors who are going to get rich off of a person's foolishness or lack of careful thinking.

...Maybe tattooing isn't for you.

...Maybe you shouldn't get that \$10 tattoo your friend's been telling you he'll give you, in his garage.

...Maybe you shouldn't let your buddies tattoo your hand with Indian ink and a needle at this weekend's party.

...Maybe you should get a tattoo on your back instead of on your hand.

...Maybe you should get a tattoo on your left wrist so it can be covered by your watch if you have to.

...And maybe after reading this FAQ and reading RAB, you'll think carefully about it, and make some informed, wise decisions about what to do with your body.

Tattooing can be beautiful.

Tattooing can be exhilarating.

Tattooing can open a whole new world for you.

...but make sure to do it RIGHT.

RELIGIOUS (CHRISTIAN) ARGUMENTS

Written by: Chris Wayne originator of RAB and a self-professed Christian.

A word to the religious: In Leviticus 19:28, it says not to tattoo "I am the Lord" on you (i.e. don't take the name of the Lord in vain). It does NOT say you can't mark yourself at all, and it does NOT say there's anything wrong about piercing.

What it DOES say is that it prohibits mutilating yourself for the dead, which was a senseless practice at that time. But for Christians, they are no longer bound by the Law. Remember that it's not what you do; it's what's in your heart when you do it. The Talmud even mentions that it's not the tattooing that is wrong, but what the tattoo is of (i.e. if the tattoo is an image of a 'false god' as opposed to just a 'design').

There are probably many 'prim & proper' Christians out there that have had the urge to be tattooed, but have repressed it because they believed it was a sin. Well, if you really believe that it is a sin, then it is. But is getting tattooed really a sin? If it draws you away from Christ or causes someone else to stumble, then yes. But tattooing isn't any more special than anything else we distract ourselves with.

Take things in moderation at your speed. We are to deny ourselves of things if they cause us to lose sight of Jesus (for some, it could be driving a car, getting married, having children, going to work, smoking, abusing drugs & alcohol, disrespect, etc.). If you have good discernment, you know what distracts you from Christ and what doesn't.

Tattooing isn't inherently evil; it got its 'evil' status because GOD-less heathens from places like the South Pacific were tattooed. Do what pleases GOD; and one thing that pleases GOD is to be confident in oneself (not overly prideful, but confidence tempered with discernment, almost bordering on arrogance). Tattooing can bring out that confidence, because to be tattooed requires commitment. And that's a conquering power over fear and old ruts. GOD wants mature dynamic individuals that fear him to fellowship with, not people cowering in fear from some rigid set of laws. Note: fear of GOD is totally different from cowering in fear.

Some Christians will claim that drinking any amount of alcohol is sinful, but the medical community is saying that 2-3 drinks a day is good for the heart. Drink responsibly. So, for those that have repressed getting a tattoo because of family or religious upbringing, just do it. If it's not for you, fine - but don't ruin it for the others.

Tattooing in no way marks who's saved and who's not. If you've seen the trilogy "A Distant Thunder," the Mark of the Beast was tattooed on your right hand or forehead. The tattoo was 666 in binary '6's (i.e. 1 0 11 0 11 0 1 Sort of like a UPC code), but this doesn't mean that every tattoo is a Mark of the Beast.

People have stated that the credit card and the computer were tools of the Devil. So what? Everybody depends on both today, even if the Anti-Christ is to use the computer to control the population, it doesn't mean that if you use a computer, you're a follower of the Devil.

I believe that religion, when improperly used, is a dangerous thing. Christianity has wasted a lot of valuable time trying to influence people in believing that unimportant things are evil instead of spreading the word of GOD. Christianity (or those prideful, arrogant, self righteous leaders) has looked down on tattooing far too long.

THE DECISION PROCESS

MAKING THE BIG PLUNGE:

WHERE CAN I FIND A GOOD ARTIST

WHAT SHOULD I LOOK FOR IN A TATTOO ARTIST?

The bane of the tattoo world is the shadowy, unprofessional person called the scratcher. A scratcher is somebody who:

- Does not have the proper training in either tattoo art or of running a professional operation;
- Does not know and/or care to use responsible sterilization methods;
- Promises to provide tattooing services for an incredibly low fee, for free, or in exchange for drugs (ack!);
- Chooses not to apprentice through a legitimate tattoo shop because of one excuse or another (but lacks the knowledge one needs to work in or run a professional shop)
- Will hurt you because they don't know what they're doing;
- Will give you a permanent tattoo you will regret for the rest of your life;
- You should stay away with a ten-foot pole.

Never, never, never get work from a scratcher unless you are willing to accept all the hazards listed above.

Of those in a study by Clinton Sanders who regretted their tattoos, more than two-thirds of them regretted their tattoo because of poor quality! Looking for an artist can be as easy as checking the Yellow Pages, or as complex as checking references, magazine photos, etc. There are a number of ways to find good artists, including (but certainly not limited to):

- Perusing tattoo magazines. While not all tattoo magazines are of the National Geographic quality, the photos will speak for themselves. Some issues highlight specific artists' works; a good way see the type of work someone does. Use the photos in the magazines to compare with those of the artist you are interested in. These magazines have done a lot to show what is possible.

Some things to look for in magazines:

- Style (realistic, black & grey work, tribal, etc.)
- Placement on your body
- Ideas for images
- Size in proportion to your body
- Artists whose work you like.
- Attending a tattoo convention.

Read the section on tattoo conventions for more information.

You can approach this one of two ways. You can either go to a shop because someone recommended the artist to you, or you can go in cold. For obvious reasons, you will have a little more information with you if you already know something about the artist. This may make you feel more at ease when going into a shop for the first time.

Many of the top-notch artists recommended in this FAQ are very busy and work on an appointment - only basis. Visit their shop anyway - you will still learn about them even if it doesn't mean getting work done right then and there.

Body art enthusiast Dr. Kai Kristensen, a pathologist and a recently retired lab director of an internationally prestigious medical center in La Jolla (California), says the most important aspects of a good result are to:

- Choose an experienced, knowledgeable performer who knows about sterilization and avoidance of infection.
- Avoid infection during the healing process.

With both of those bases covered, healing of either should be non-eventful and the desired appearance should be guaranteed.

WHAT KIND OF DESIGN SHOULD I GET?

What images do you think of when you think of a tattoo? Do you think of anchors, of roses or of skulls? While these traditional images are still available, you will be pleasantly surprised at the variety you will find today.

There are two basic types of tattoos: *flash*, and *custom*. As you can imagine, "custom" means you have a design you like that you take in with you. "Flash" is the stock designs you see on the walls of the shop.

The main thing to remember is that you're not required to choose from the selection of flash in a shop-- You're NOT limited to just an anchor, a rose or a skull. Remember however, that these smaller pieces of pre-priced flash are the bread & butter of many shops, since they are proportionately expensive (\$75 for 20 minutes' work, for example where an artist might charge \$150 an hour for custom work). Also, the number of customers who lay out the big bucks for large, elaborate custom pieces is too small to keep a regular shop in business.

MAIN TATTOO STYLES:

BIO-MECHANICAL: A style popularized by illustrator H.R. Giger, who designed the creature from the Alien movies. Bio-mechanical work usually involves an anatomical flesh intertwined with some technical drawings of machines. A close relative of this style involves just the biological look of flesh without the mechanical parts.

BLACK & GREY: Refers to the colors used, this style requires the artist to have advanced shading techniques for subtlety.

CELTIC: Beautiful, intricate knotwork of the Celts (a hard "k", NOT a soft "c" like the basketball team). These are much harder for artists to do, and is best done by someone who specializes in it. usually done in just black ink.

ORIENTAL: Big, bold pieces of Oriental images (carp, clouds, dragons, etc.) based on the Ukiyo-e woodblock prints of 18th Century Edo-period in Japan. Note: It is fine to call this "Oriental" and not "Asian," because it references an object and not a person.

PORTRAIT: Images taken from photos, best done by someone who can render realistic photographic images. Usually done in black and grey ink.

TRADITIONAL: Traditional sailor tattoo style made famous by Jerry Collins in Honolulu.

TRIBAL: Usually bold simple lines, simple patterns. Almost always done with just black ink.

With a good artist working for you, you can get practically any image you'd like. Accomplished artists can render portraits, wildlife psychedelic and biomechanical styles with impressive results. Your main challenge is to find the artist who can best do the design YOU want.

WHAT KIND OF COLORS CAN I GET?

Concerned that you'll end up with a greenish tattoo with little bits of red or yellow? Worry no more! Today's inks run the entire gamut and it would not be terribly sarcastic to take a Pantone color chart with you!

Most tattoo inks are metal salt-based pigments that are not made specifically to be used under the skin, and have not been approved by the FDA for this purpose. The idea is that for most people, these pigments are inert and cause no problems. Some people have been known to have allergic reactions; any reputable artist should be willing to provide you with a small "patch test" of the colors you desire. This is required in the state of Arkansas.

Tattooist Uncle Bud Yates (Pikes Peak Tattooing) says some artists use acrylic-based pigments, which he feels may be more troublesome than the metal-based pigments for some with sensitive skin. Best to ask your artist first.

HOW TO LOOK AROUND IN THE SHOP

Don't let the shop intimidate you when you first walk in. For the uninked, a tattoo shop is intimidating enough. Strange smells, strange sounds. Some shops even try to look intimidating to create a tough-guy feel. Just keep in mind that you're a potential customer. Consider it window shopping.

The first thing you should do is to take a minute to look around. Chances are, you'll encounter some flash (stock illustrations) stapled on the walls. These will most likely lean toward the traditional. Skull and crossbones, roses and the like.

You might also see some signs ("No minors; we ID," "We have sanitary conditions" etc.). These signs will also be indicators of the personality of the shop owner. If the signs seem overly intimidating, patronizing or snobbish, they can be tip-offs of the shop's attitude. Some are very friendly, with plants, aquarium fish, and signs like "Tattooed people come in all colors."

Note: There is no national law regarding the legal age for tattooing. Check with the shop to find out what the local statute regulates.

ASKING TO SEE THEIR PORTFOLIO

Do NOT be impressed by the flash on the wall. These illustrations are usually purchased from other artists and do not represent the work of your artist. Frankly, anyone with some experience can easily trace the outlines of these illustrations and fill in the colors.

What you really need to look at is a book that contains a collection of photos of the artist's work. Go to the counter and ask to see one. If they tell you they don't have one, walk out immediately. You're visiting the shop to commission a piece of art to be permanently illustrated on your skin; for the artist to tell you s/he doesn't have samples in a portfolio is insulting.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN THEIR PORTFOLIO

When you do look in their portfolio, there are a few things to keep in mind. Do you see any photos of pieces that you recognize in the flash (on the wall, or in a flash book)? If so, how is it rendered in tattoo format? Before anything else, check to see that the lines are clean. Are they well-defined? Straight where they should be; not shaky or blurry? Are the borders all uniform in width? Do the colors seem true? Are they bright? Proportionately correct?

Look at the people in the book. This can be an indicator of the clientele in the shop (besides looking at the ambiance of the shop). Is there a fair mix of women and men in the book? Are they all sporting "biker" tats, or any one particular genre/style?

Again, keep in mind that anyone can stencil an outline of an illustration onto your skin. The skill in the artistry comes in the shading, use of colors and other subtle things that set an artist apart from a simple tattooist.

Do you see anything in the portfolio that is not in the flash? These are the custom pieces that the artists have done, and they should be their crowning glory. How do they look? Do you like what you see? If there is more than one artist working in the shop, and you see some photos you like, make sure to find out which artist did the work.

WHAT KINDS OF QUESTIONS TO ASK

Whenever you ask to see their collection of photos, the person in the shop will hopefully immediately recognize you as someone who knows a little more about tattoos--at least enough not to be satisfied by looking at just the flash. If the shop is not too busy or if the artist is not in the middle of working, they might stand on the other side of the counter to have a conversation with you. This is a wonderful opportunity to ask questions of the artist.

Reasonable questions to ask in your conversation that won't take too much time for the artist to answer:

- What is their favorite style?
- If what you are looking to get done happens to be their specialty you are in luck; be it tribal, wildlife or whatever.
- Is there any one particular subject they like to do?

One artist, without hesitation, told me his favorite was skulls. I would've jumped for joy had that been what I wanted.

- How long has the shop been here?

This may be an indicator of the stability of their business. The tat industry in itself fluctuates, but continuity implies business acumen, responsible practices and the fact they are not a fly-by-night operations.

- How long have they been at the shop?

The shop may have been there for 20 years, but the artist may only have been there for a couple of months. If they have been there for what you consider a short period, ask them where they were before.

- How long have they been tattooing?

It might not matter so much that the artist has only been there for a short while, if they've been tattooing for several years. They might come from various backgrounds - anywhere from working on friends to having a fine arts degree. This type of information will give you more insight into the artist's attitude as well as aptitude.

- Do they get to do much custom work?

This may depend on where the shop is located, but it also depends on how good of an artist they are, and whether they have their own style for which they are known for.

- Do they use apprentices at the shop?

It is often difficult for new artists to break into the business, and an apprenticeship is often a very good way to learn not only about tattooing itself, but also about the day-to-day operation of a small business. For artists to take apprenticeships means they're interested in expanding the art form, in giving a new person a break (so to speak) and feeling confident enough about their own skills that they feel they can offer some insight and experience for the new person. This again goes back to the attitude of the artist and the shop.

Don't let the looks of the artist intimidate you. Tattoo artists usually have a lot of tattoos themselves. In fact, I would be somewhat leery of an artist who has NO tattoos at all. The main thing is that you need to talk with them and get a feel for what they are like. As you talk with the artist and build a rapport, if you feel comfortable you may want to broach the subject of what you're interested in getting done. Bounce your idea off with the artist and see what they are willing to help you with.

Remember however, that the artist is running a professional business! Be polite - don't linger and overspend your welcome if you don't plan on getting any work done at all.

Note: Don't base your decision according to what tattoos you see on the artist - they were not done by that person!

WHAT SORTS OF THINGS TO LOOK FOR IN A SHOP

Looking critically at the shop is as important as choosing your artist. Make sure the place is very clean, make sure the artist uses disposable, single-use needles (that are not re-used after one client), and

uses an autoclave for all other equipment. Don't be afraid to ask them, either. A legitimate artist will be glad to show you.

What does the shop look like? What is its ambiance? Does it look like a barber shop, a hair salon, dental office or an art gallery? If you are a nonsmoker, will cigarette smoke bother you? Look for used ashtrays as signs. Do the work areas offer you any privacy? Do they use shower curtains, private booths or shoulder-high room dividers?

Try to go and visit and then come back another day. Don't feel pressured into having to get one right then and there. Try and talk to some people that have experience with the artist (and not the groupies that you'll find hanging around the shop). You should feel comfortable with the artist and you should like him/her. If you don't, then don't get a tattoo.

Make sure the artist is willing to listen to you and respects what you want. Don't go to an artist that has an agenda of what he/she wants to do. The artist may make suggestions, but the final word is always yours.

Finally, make sure you take their business card with you. If the artist you talk to does not have his/her own card, jot down the name on the back, and perhaps some notes to yourself about the shop and the artist.

R-E-S-P-E-C-T: WHAT TO ASK FROM ARTISTS?

It has been brought to my attention that some tattooists have an attitude problem when it comes to potential customers. Tattooists (and piercers!) need to realize that not every person who walks in has to look like a grunged-out leather-wearing biker, or a raven-haired Cleopatra-eyed septum-pierced zombie. People from all walks of life may be interested in body art.

A potential customer should NOT be made to feel out-of-place or ashamed for walking in wearing a business suit, or an LL Bean dress. It is amazing to think that someone with purple hair and eyebrow rings could actually discriminate against someone, but apparently, this seems to be happening.

Just as a customer should expect certain sanitation standards, they should also expect an inviting atmosphere.

TATTOO SHOPS INSURED?

Most reputable tattoo shops are insured. The problem is, they're usually insured against premises liability. This means that they have insurance coverage if you fall and hit your head on their floor, but NOT if you're unhappy with their work. In the past, the only insurer who would cover the latter was Lloyd's of London, and their rates were apparently very high.

This has changed recently, with the availability of a comprehensive insurance package available from one agent based on the West Coast. Many shops do have some form of insurance (this may be a requirement in their rental lease). Just keep in mind that the insurance does not necessarily cover QUALITY.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST TO GET A TATTOO?

This is an age-old debate, so the following is just a very basic ballpark. You usually pay for work either by the piece, or by the hour. The smaller pieces in the artist's flash book are "standard stock" material that usually don't take the artist too long to do. For these, you might find prices listed right next to the artwork. The artist may have a "minimum" charge that might vary with each artist.

Larger (or custom) pieces will usually be charged by the hour (unless you and the artist decide beforehand on the total price). If you get a "stock" piece (probably about 2" x 2" in size), you will probably not pay more than \$100 and sit no longer than an hour in the chair. Your mileage may vary.

If you bring your own design, the artist may charge anywhere from \$50 to a few hundred dollars an hour, depending on the artist. However, you may want to work with someone who charges \$100 or so an hour; after all, you DO get what you pay for. Also, some artists charge for illustration time prior to beginning tattoo work. If they do, this might increase your price by an extra hour. If they tell you that your piece will be charged by the hour, ask them how many hours they think it'll take. If you are on a limited budget, tell them how much you can afford.

Price negotiation should be up front and straightforward, a part of your initial discussion before work begins. Some shops take credit cards; most don't. Out-of-towners may be asked to put down a deposit. Be particularly wary of people willing to work "for cheap" or "for free." They are often artists just starting out, who are still developing their skills. Caveat emptor.

Warning: Once the artist quotes you a price, DON'T DICKER WITH IT! The best way to get on the artist's bad side is to try to bargain with the price. If you think the price is too high, renegotiate the scope of the artwork - NOT the price. I usually do it this way: "Hi, I have X amount I can spend on this design. What can we work out for that price?"

If you are very pleased with their work and service, you are strongly encouraged to tip the artist, even if they own the shop. Even shop owners don't pocket 100% of what they make (remember - it's a business!). Tips can range from 10% to 20% of the piece, so be prepared with cash on hand.

I personally recommend a tip for any work which you are pleased with, or any custom work where the artist spent time drawing up your illustration (since drawing time is usually not included in your price). Nothing brightens up a day for the artist, or helps to build a friendly relationship with your artist more than a generous tip. If you're very happy with the artist and you think you might get more work from them later, TIP!!

There have been heated discussions on rec.arts.bodyart in the past regarding the appropriateness of tipping a shop OWNER. If you feel that an owner does not deserve a tip on top of the price s/he charges you, then A) do not give a tip at all, or B) bring some sort of offering, be it food, flowers or whatever.

Many tattoo artists have told me that the BEST TIP is good word of mouth. If you are happy with your tattoo, show it off to your friends and tell them where you got it done!

HOW SHOULD I ACT WHEN I GET IN THAT CHAIR?

Once you have settled on a design and a price that you and your artist agree on, the work will either begin right then, or you will be asked to come back for a later appointment (e.g. if the artist has another client coming in 15 minutes).

Once you're in that chair, what can you expect? Most likely, the artist will begin the long process of preparing for your work. This is especially true if the artist is going to do a custom design that you brought in. First, the design will have to be worked on. Most artists will play around with the design on paper first, although some artists will do it freehand. "Freehand" means the artist takes an ink pen to hand and begins drawing a design on your skin without the use of a stencil (NOT where the artist begins work with the tattooing machine immediately - the artist, no matter how good, still needs to envision how the work will look on your skin - proportion, placement, etc.

When you and the artist are happy with the design, the artist might outline the design with a piece of carbon paper, or use an old-fashioned copy machine to get a working copy of it. This would be when the artist would properly size the design. The artist will then clean your skin where the work will be done (probably an alcohol or antiseptic rub), and will swipe your skin with an "adhesive," which is usually Speed Stick deodorant (for some reason I haven't seen any other brands). The artist will then put the carbon side of the design directly on your skin. When the paper is lifted, ta-da! A carbon line drawing of the design should appear on your skin!

The artist will probably let you look in a mirror to make sure you are happy with the design and the placement. Once this is agreed upon, the artist will then begin putting the supplies out. At this point, your artist should be doing things like dispensing various colors of ink into little disposable wells, and rigging a new set of needles into the tattoo machine. At this time, you will probably try to look cool by looking around the studio walls or occasionally looking to see what your artist is doing. Your artist might have a radio playing, which will help distract you a little.

At this point, it is best for you to try and relax. You can ask the artists about some things, like the colors of the ink. Depending on the work you are getting, the artist will need to mix some colors, for example. You're probably somewhat nervous, but excited at the same time because you're actually gonna get a real tattoo! Whether you realize it or not, your body is going through quite an adrenalin rush. Try to remain calm and not too anxious. Your hyped-up condition and your anxiety about the anticipated pain of your experience by themselves may trigger a fainting spell. It will help if you are not there on an empty stomach. Get a bite to eat about an hour or two before you go in for your session. Having hard candy or some juice on hand during the session is also recommended.

Just relax and try to stay calm. For women, the experience of anxious anticipation is similar to a pelvic exam at an OB/GYN, where you are more nervous about it while waiting for the doctor as you lie prone on the examining table, feet in the stirrups. Just as most exams aren't painful or really all that bad, neither is tattooing.

Bzzzzztttt....The artist starts up the machine, dips the needle into the ink and starts to work toward your skin! Aaaaaahhhh!!! Will it hurt? Will it hurt? Grit your teeth! Hang tight!...

Ooohhhhhhhh! It does hurt! Ow! Ow! Ow! I'm okay, I'm okay, this is fine, and it's not that bad. I can grit my teeth. Grit, grit, grit. Try to smile a bit. My teeth are gritting, anyway. Oh, I hope this pain doesn't stay like this!! Breathe. Don't forget to breathe. Relax. Relax. Relax. Okay there, that's better. Not so painful. I can handle it. Yeah - look at all the tattoos He's got on his arms. I can handle it, too. Yeah.

...The most painful part of the process will pass in a couple of minutes, after which the area will feel abuzz with electricity and warmth. Just try to relax and breathe deeply - enjoy the one-of-a-kind experience that you're feeling. Oftentimes, you end up clenching your jaws, grinding your teeth or grasping the chair with your white-knuckled hands. But once you pass the first couple of minutes, you'll feel silly for having worried about it so much. If you still feel uncomfortable after a few minutes, it may be because you're sitting in an uncomfortable position. See if you can get into a more comfortable, reclining position - but make sure to ask the artist first before you try to move.

Some people try to distract themselves by trying to talk with the artist. This is kind of like with hair stylists - some stylists just love to gab and gab (just ask them an open-ended question), while some

stylists would rather concentrate and not screw up your hairdo. Same with tattoo artists. While some will like to "talk story" with you, others would rather concentrate on the work you're paying them to do. After all, their job, income, and reputation are on the line when they have the tattooing machine to your skin. Often, they'll talk during easy parts, and less during complex work. Just go with the flow and not worry about it.

The only thing I don't particularly prefer is if there's a lot of traffic walking around in the studio and the artist has to keep talking to them (either potential clients or tattoo groupies). For this reason, a cubicle or dividing partition is a nice option for privacy.

Most people can sit through over an hour of work, but if you get uncomfortable, just ask your artist if you can take a break. If you feel woozy, you might consider bringing some candy with you to give you a little lift, or some water to drink.

WHERE ON MY BODY SHOULD I GET A TATTOO?

This may seem VERY trivial, since the answer can be "anywhere you please!" The ONLY places you cannot technically get permanent tattoos are your hair, teeth and nails (even the cornea used to be tattooed years ago for medical purposes). Interestingly, women and men tend to get tattoos in different locations. This, according to sociologist Clinton Sanders, is because men and women get tattoos for different reasons.

Men, he says, get them to show others, while women get them for the sake of decorating their body - and often place them where they can't normally be seen, so that it doesn't prompt comments about her "reputation." However for the sake of this FAQ, the following is a short list of areas to get inked. I am included the statistics from Clinton Sanders' study on the body location of the first tattoo for men and women as well (there were 111 men in his survey group and 52 women).

Head: The "head" here refers mostly to the area where your hair grows. You'll need to shave the area for the tat to be most visible. If you need to hide your tat, you can grow your hair out. Areas more commonly inked are the sides of the head (above the ears), and above the nape on the neck in the back. There are people who have their entire heads inked. I am told that the tattooing process vibrates your skull!

Sides of neck (nape):

Back of neck: I've seen some tribal pieces, and bats done on the back of the neck. You'll need to keep your hair short or tied up to keep it visible.

Face: Various areas possible. Facial tattoos could fall into the cosmetic or standard categories. Cosmetic would include darkening of eyebrows, eyelining, liplining, etc. Getting a tat on the face is serious business and crosses a portal because people will never look at you the same way.

Upper chest: One of the standard areas for tattoos for both men and women. Allows lots of flat area in which to get a fairly large piece. One of the areas where you can choose to get symmetrically inked on both sides. (Men: 5%, women: 35% - chest & breast combined)

Breasts (women): Used to be trendy to get a tiny tat on the breast. Women (particularly larger breasted ones) need to be careful about eventual sagging of the skin in the area. Don't get a tat that will look silly when it starts to stretch (like a round smiley face that'll turn into an oblong frown).

Nipples: Usually the artist leaves the nipples alone - the omission of ink tends not to be so noticeable. There HAS been work done with tattooing a facsimile of a nipple onto a breast in reconstructive surgery for those who have lost their nipples, though - for aesthetic and self-esteem purposes.

Rib cage: Can be rather painful because of all the ribs you work over. However it offers a fairly large area, and can be incorporated into a major back piece, wrapping around toward the front.

Stomach/Abdomen: Some people choose not to get work done on their stomachs for a couple of reasons. Area is difficult to work on because there's no solid backing to hold the skin down. It is a sensitive area that may feel uncomfortable. The tat may look horrible after your metabolism slows down and you develop a..."beer gut." (Men: Less than 5%, women: 14% Women concerned about the effect of pregnancy on a stomach tattoo can read the section specifically devoted to this in this Tattoo FAQ.

Genitals: Yes, some people do get inked in their genital area. The idea may sound very painful, but it's really not all that bad. However, do consider that, due to the stretchiness of the skin and the amount of movement the area experiences, it's not really possible to do anything with a lot of fine detail. And no, the penis does not have to be erect during tattooing, although a tattoo artist I know who has done several penis tattoos said that he did have one customer who had a full erection the whole time. The only female genital tattoo I've seen (inner labia, I think) was in Modern Primitives, and it looked rather blurry. Note: Some artists refuse to do genitals. (Men: 0%; women: 5 %)

Thighs/hips: A popular area for women to get larger pieces (often extending from the hip area). Shows well with a bathing suit but easily concealable in modest shorts. The entire area of skin around your thighs is bigger than your back, so you can get quite a bit of work done. (Men: 3%; women: 10%)

Calves: Nice area to get a standard size (2" x 2"). However if you have very hairy legs, it may cut down on the visibility somewhat. (Men: 7%; women: 8%. Category simply listed as leg/foot)

Ankles: Currently trendy. I think you have to have an ankle tat before you can go to the Eileen Ford Agency with your modeling portfolio. :) You can either get a spot piece on the inner or outer ankle, or get something that goes around in a band. Vines and other vegetation seem popular (pumpkins, anyone?)

Feet: I've seen some incredible footwork (pun intended) in some of the tat magazines. Concealable with shoes. Probably don't have as much wear and tear as hands so you might get less blurring and color loss. This however, is the TOPS of your feet. You will have trouble retaining a tattoo on the bottom of your feet.

Armpits: Usually reserved for those who want to get full coverage around the arm and chest area, & need the armpits filled. Probably not strongly recommended for the highly ticklish.

Upper arms: One of the most common areas for men, although I have seen some nice work on women as well. If you decide to get a piece done on your upper arm, consider how much sun it's going to get. Will you be able to put sunblock on it regularly? Otherwise, expect some color loss and blurring. If you want some serious work done and you wanna show it off, you may want to consider getting a "half sleeve" - full tat coverage throughout your upper arm. (Men: 70%; women: 18%. Category simply states arm/hand)

Inner arms: A more unusual location than the outer upper arm area, this area is often not easily visible. Be careful if your genes are prone to "bat wing" flab, however.

Forearms: Popeye sported his anchor on his forearm. Probably not as popular as the upper arm but common just the same. You can have your upper arm "sleeve" extend down for a full sleeve.

Wrists: Janis Joplin had a dainty tat on her wrist...easily concealable with a watch.

Hands (fingers and palms): RAB receives frequent queries about fingers, palms and hands in general. Some artists don't do hands because the ink will have a tendency to blur or fade easily. Consider that you probably move your hands the most out of your entire body. A friend of mine had a multi-colored tat on his finger by Ed Hardy (who cringed upon hearing about where my friend wanted it), that is only several years old and is now barely noticeable.

Some people want to substitute their wedding bands with tat bands. Your palm doesn't retain ink well - if you can find an artist who will do it, you can expect it to be a rather basic line, and that it will not last too long. Perhaps just matching tats someplace else would be okay? There IS a photo of a tattoo on a palm in Sandi Feldman's book on Japanese tattooing. This seems to be an exception.

Shoulder blades: The back shoulder blade area is another popular spot for women, who can show off the work with a bathing suit or tank top, but cover it up with regular clothes. If this is the case, be particularly careful with sun because you're not gonna be wearing that unless it's warm & sunny. It's a "safe" place - but may get in the way if you decide to commit yourself to a large back piece. (Men: 15%, women: 15%. Category listed as backs/shoulder)

Back: You can get any part of your back done, or find yourself an artist you really like, and save your money for a "back piece" that encompasses your entire back. Expect to pay several thousand dollars for a full back piece (not to mention many tat sessions).

Buttocks: Again, beware of potential sagging in the area.

CAN I GET INFECTIOUS DISEASES FROM TATTOO NEEDLES?

There has been some concern recently regarding transmittable diseases (particularly Hepatitis-B and AIDS [HIV]) and tattoo shops. Just as in a dentist's office, as long as the area is strictly sanitized, your chances for infection will be greatly reduced.

Note: If you plan on getting lots of body art (piercings or tattoos), you should seriously consider getting immunized against Hepatitis-B. Hep-B is a much more serious concern than HIV as the virus is much more virulent and easier to catch.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A SANITARY SHOP ENVIRONMENT

The current popularity of tattooing and body piercing has also brought on an increase in potentially hazardous conditions. RAB regulars have begun posting information on unsanitary practices. For this reason, I am posting the following guideline of what to look out for (in this situation, "artist" refers to both tattooists and piercers):

- Lighting: The area must be well-lit so the artist can see what s/he is doing.
- Counter and floor space should be lightly colored, preferably white so dirt shows up easier.
- The spray bottle the artist uses on your skin should be disinfected between customers, or some kind of protective film such as Saran Wrap should be used.

- Disposing needles: All needles must be either discarded after EACH use (or at least with each new customer), or autoclaved. Many body piercers operate out of small booths and may not have spent money for an autoclave, in which they MUST dispose of each needle. NO EXCEPTIONS. Reusing piercing needles is equivalent to sharing IV drugs with strangers.

- Needles touching other things: The needles, once open from their sanitary packages, must not be placed on unsanitized surfaces. The piercer should NOT set the needle down on the table, or, heaven forbid,

DROP THE NEEDLE ON THE FLOOR!!! If this happens, insist they open a new needle.

- Gloves: The artist must wash their hands prior to putting on their gloves, preferably with an antibacterial or antiseptic solution. Once they put their gloves on, they should not touch anything other than your skin, the needle, and the jewelry. They should not be filling out receipts beforehand, or answering the phone - unless these have been wiped clean beforehand.

- Is there a sink separate from the bathroom sink?

- Does the artist use a disposable razor when shaving skin?

- The Speed Stick used as an adhesive for the tattoo pattern should not be directly applied to the skin, but applied first to a tissue which can then be used on the skin.

- Autoclaves should be inspected regularly.

- Sterile materials should be stored in sealed containers away from things that could cause body fluids or ink to splash on them

- The palate that holds the ink caps should be covered with Saran Wrap

- After tattooing, the ink caps should be discarded and the ink not reused or poured back into the bottles

Be particularly wary of "outdoor fair booths." While many are run by caring, experienced artists, these booths allow fly-by-night operators to make some fast money and disappear. If you don't know the artist, spend time watching them work on others first. Are they reusing needles? Do they use needles that have dropped on the ground?

If you see any unsanitary conditions you should definitely mention it and refuse to be tattooed there. It is each customer's right to guard against getting a contamination. Worse, If you have had more than one tattoo or pierce within several months, it will be difficult for you to prove WHICH artist was responsible!

CAN I GET AIDS FROM TATTOOING?

IMPORTANT NOTE: This section refers to tattooing specifically, and not to other forms of body art. Some, such as piercing and cutting, require the breaking of the client's skin to a deeper level than what is achieved with a modern tattoo machine.

This section on AIDS & Tattooing has been contributed by Nick "Buccaneer" Baban, who studied at the Univ. of Michigan School of Public Health, Dept. of Epidemiology. He spent the summer researching AIDS and IV drug use in NYC. "I'm not an expert, but I consider myself knowledgeable.

Obviously there is some concern about AIDS and tattooing because when you get a tattoo, you bleed. But the mechanism of transmission needs to be better understood.

AIDS is transmitted by intimate contact with bodily fluids, blood and semen being the most common. Intimate contact means that the fluid carrying the AIDS virus (HIV) enters into your system.

Injection drug users (IDUs) use hollow medical syringes and needles to inject drugs directly into their bloodstream. It is common practice to withdraw a little blood back into the syringe to delay the onset of the high. When needles are passed from IDU to IDU and reused without sterilization, some of that blood remains in the syringe and is passed on to the next user. If infected blood is passed, the recipient can become infected with HIV, which leads to AIDS.

Tattooing is VERY different from injecting drugs. The needles used in tattooing are not hollow. They do, however, travel back and forth through a hollow tube that acts as an ink reservoir. The tip of the tube is dipped into the ink, which draws a little into the tube. As the needle withdraws into the tube, it gets coated with ink. When it comes forward, it pierces your skin and deposits the ink. You then bleed a little through the needle hole. This happens several hundred times a second.

You are only at risk of infection if you come in contact with infected blood. Since it is only your skin that is being pierced during the tattooing process, only your blood is being exposed. This means that the only person at greater risk is the artist, because s/he is the only one coming in contact with someone else's (potentially infected) blood. This is why reputable (and sane) tattoo artist wears surgical gloves while working.

Another source of infection is through the use of infected tools. This is why it is IMPERATIVE that you make sure your tattoo artist uses sterile equipment. Needles and tubes need to be autoclaved before EACH AND EVERY time they are used. Ink should come from separate cups and not directly from the bottle. Any leftover ink should be disposed of and not reused under ANY circumstances.

The key to HIV transmission is transfer of bodily fluids. Evidence indicates that infection may require a (relatively) substantial amount of fluid to be passed. A pin prick almost certainly won't do it. HIV is also a very fragile virus that cannot survive long outside the human body, and is very easy to kill via autoclaving. (I have heard of using bleach to sterilize needles. While bleach is an effective HIV killer, I'm not sure of the procedures for cleaning the equipment after bleach cleaning. As I personally have no desire to have bleach put under my skin, I go with autoclaving as the proper way to sterilize).

If your tattooer maintains sterile conditions and procedures, there is almost no risk of infection. I say "almost" because any risk, no matter how miniscule, is still a risk and must be recognized. That said, I am the proud owner of a Jolly Roger tattoo on my right shoulder because I knew my tattooist and knew he had sterile conditions.

HOW TO LOOK FOR STERILIZATION

Check out the shop thoroughly. Don't be lulled into a false sense of security by a clean look. If the needles are not disposed of after each person, then it MUST be "autoclaved." Autoclaving is a process that pressurizes the instruments and kills any virus or bacteria that might transmit viruses or bacteria. My dentist has two autoclaves - one gas and one steam - both pressurizing down to 250fsw. He also has spore samples that the autoclaves and sends to a pathology lab to make sure the machines are working.

Ask the artist how they clean their needles. If they don't say they autoclave, you are taking your risks. If they say they do, ask to see their machine. Note that in some states, autoclaving is required by law. Other common-sense types of things include throwing out the ink after each customer. Make sure the

artists have small wells for each ink color that they dispense from a larger container, and that these are thrown out after work on you is done. Compare the conditions of the shop to that of your dentist - does the artist wear gloves? Are the areas sprayed clean?

According to the Navy Environmental Health Center Medical Corps in Norfolk, Virginia, each year, a few cases of Hep-B are reported in people who've gotten tattoos within the last two months, but they have not been able to trace the disease back to its source, nor attribute it directly to the tattoo.

Becky Fenton says: "I spoke with a disease infection specialist at Kaiser [Permanente - US West Coast health care system], and there have not been any incidents (as of 1990) of HIV being spread to a recipient of a tattoo. If you think about it, the tattooist is much more at risk, as s/he has to touch the customer's blood.

David Zinner notes that a blanket statement regarding the use of autoclaves could be misleading. While an autoclave will kill the HIV virus, it is not because of the efficacy of the 'clave, but because of the weakness of that particular virus. Far more insidious is Hepatitis, which is more tenacious, and which a 'clave does not always kill.

The irony, he says, is that now virtually anyone can afford a 'clave, because many hospitals are selling them secondhand for a very good price, and switching either to disposables, or purchasing dry-heat or chemical sterilizers. Chemical is the best rated, and he says that his friend's business has increased because of the precautions he takes.

In response to David's well-founded concern, Dr. Milton Diamond from the UH School of Medicine who has been researching sexuality for 30 years, says: Hepatitis is easier to transmit than HIV but all the bugs will be killed IF the autoclave is run properly (i.e., set hot enough & long enough). Some instruments can not, however, be autoclaved since they can't take the heat. These have to be sterilized with viracides, "bug"acides and so forth. In any case, here in the States, EVERYONE should be using disposable needles.

The chemical bath is only as effective as how fresh is it, how concentrated, what chemicals, how "dirty" or contaminated the instruments, how long in the bath, which particular bug is under attack, etc. It is not the device, autoclave or chemical bath that is as important as the operator. There are many different bugs out there. HIV may be one of the most deadly and Hep among the more easily transmitted but many others have to be considered (including Chlamydia, the infection rate of which is 20 %!) and "he who aims at one, hits one." "Mo betta aim fo dem all." If the artist or piercer is conscientious, reliable and knowledgeable, either device could serve. Again my general rule still stands: "EVERYONE should be using disposable needles."

Dr. Kai Kristensen says: The needles that push the ink into the skin (below the epidermis or outer covering and into the mid-dermis or support structure under the epidermis) can transmit disease UNLESS STERILE TO BEGIN WITH. When they have been used on you, whatever bugs you carry in your blood can be transmitted to the next person. The most commonly transmitted disease by needle stick is Hepatitis B (and C). Clearly AIDS could be transmitted even though not documented yet to my knowledge.

The skin should be cleaned with antibacterial soap and water and scrubbing before the procedure to lessen the normal population of germs on the hide. Alcohol doesn't do much but tends to degrease and cool, so no harm but no substitute.

USE OF DISPOSABLE GLOVES:

A conscientious, professional tattooist or piercer will often go through A DOZEN DISPOSABLE GLOVES on one client.

Gloves SHOULD be changed every time they touch unsanitized items with their gloves. If you see that the artist does not change gloves after answering the phone, they are not being sanitary. Marginally acceptable is if they pick up the phone (or other objects, such as pencil) with a tissue. Optimally, they should use a new pair of gloves after each potential contamination.

AUTOCLAVING TO STERILIZE

Autoclaving is accepted in the industry as the way to sterilize non-disposable equipment. Autoclave machines look like small metal washing machines - usually with the door in the front. They are usually no larger than the computer with which you are reading this.

Uncle Bud recommends that autoclaves should be run at 273 degrees F for 55 minutes (from a cold start) at 15 lbs per square inch pressure (PSI); the minimum standard is 20 minutes at full temperature and pressure.

Further, he suggests that the solid stainless steel needles and tubes be ultrasonically cleaned to remove particulate debris before being packaged into individual autoclaving bags. Even new needles need to go through this cleaning process, to remove any leftover flux from the soldering process. Equipment that IS supposed to be autoclaved should be torn out of their sterile packaging in plain view of the customer.

CAN MY TATTOOS GET INFECTED?

Not as long as you take care of your new tat. There is a section in the FAQ that covers healing methods in depth. Some people have trouble healing tattoos with colors they are allergic to. If it gets infected and refuses to heal after a few days of using a topical antibiotic, you may want to check with a doctor. Keep in mind this assumes you are a healthy individual without any condition that suppresses your immune system.

ARE THERE ANY MEDICAL CONDITIONS THAT WILL PRECLUDE ME FROM GETTING A TATTOO?

Yes - If you have hemophilia. There is even a case of a man who was HIV positive who got a tattoo - if you are HIV+ however, you will want to inform the artist, since it's the artist that is at more risk than you. In the case of the HIV+ man, he was John Baldetta, a former nursing assistant at Harborview Medical Center in Seattle, who got a tat on his forearm that said "HIV Positive." He was suspended for three days without pay and told he could return if he covered up the tat. He refused and was subsequently fired, although he was not an RN and was not doing anything that would put patients at risk.

However, it is best to let the artist know if you have ANY medical condition, such as diabetes or epilepsy, in case of an emergency. If you have multiple allergies, you can always have the artist do a "patch test" on you with the colors you want prior to returning for a regular tattoo. This is similar to patch tests done for perms and hair coloring, and will help you determine if your body will react to some of the pigments. Also, it is generally not considered a good idea to tattoo pregnant women.

WHAT IS THE ALLIANCE OF PROFESSIONAL TATTOOISTS?

This section was contributed by Pat Sinatra, a professional tattoo artist and vice president of the organization:

The Alliance of Professional Tattooists (APT), Inc. is a professional standards organization that was established in March 1992 and officially incorporated in June '92 as a non-profit organization (contributions, fees and educational materials are tax deductible).

Note: Do a search online for Professional Tattoo Associations in your country of residence

Their activities:

- Continuing education to artists
- Offers accurate, up-to-date information about communicable diseases through seminars
- Is interested in preserving tattooing as an art form
- Monitors legislative activity to prevent over-regulation (controlled or banned)
- Believes in keeping the art of tattooing safe and legal through education, knowledge and awareness
- Offers reliable information to tattoo lovers about safe tattoo practices to ensure your health.

Their nine-hour seminar entitled, "Preventing Disease Transmission in Tattooing," is taught by APT secretary, Dr. Kris Sperry (Fulton County Medical Examiner, involved with tattooing for over 10 years). Designed in 1988 to educate health care workers (including tattooists) in the prevention of infection and the implementation of professional standards, the program was specifically redesigned in 1991-1992 for the needs of the tattooist and is the standard for APT members. Since the 1991 Blood borne Pathogens Rule, APT, Inc. has designed this manual for tattooists.

PDTT is presented in various locations throughout the country at a one time fee of \$125.00 (APT members) or \$300.00 (non-members). This course is open to the Professional and Associate levels only. Members are required to complete this seminar within two years after initial application.

While we have noted that many individuals are promoting videos on this subject, OSHA (the US Occupational Safety & Health Association that regulates work-environment safety) says that an infection control program cannot be taught by video, but by an on-site knowledgeable individual on site.

OSHA believes that the in-person interaction between instructor and student is vital to the education of this serious subject, and that individual questions regarding infection control, universal precautions, disease transmission, pathology, etc., must be answered by a knowledgeable, credible instructor such as Dr. Sperry.

SHOULD I GET A VACCINATION SHOT AGAINST HEPATITIS?

Without everyone worried about HIV transmission, it is easy to forget that hepatitis (specifically hep-B) is a much stronger and virulent virus to worry about. Fortunately, you can get protection against both

hepatitis A and B! Check with your health insurance to see if it's covered - otherwise, you might have to shell out \$200 or so for both.

There are two shots (injected a month apart) for hep-A, and three shots (injected over the course of six months) for hep-B. You are strongly urged to get protected if you are planning to get tattoos OR pierces on a regular basis.

As a warning however, note that a very small percentage of individuals react negatively to Hepatitis B vaccines, and could actually become ill from the vaccines themselves. If you are contemplating getting vaccinated for Hep B, talk to your health care professional to weigh the risks against the benefits. Note: Not all health care professionals are apprised of the most current statistics on the adverse effects of Hep B vaccines.

TATTOO CONVENTIONS: WHAT ARE THEY ALL ABOUT?

People go to tattoo conventions for various reasons. Enthusiasts may go to visit with or meet out-of-town artists, get new tattoos, look at other people's tattoos or show off their own. Artists may go to purchase flash work from other artists, visit with old friends or to gain more visibility in the field. If you are interested in finding out what's going on in the tattoo world, the convention is the way to go.

The one thing that I find marvelous, wonderful and so exciting about tattoo conventions, is that you can meet excellent and well-known artists "in the flesh" and see many of them work! What other kind of convention can you go to, where fans can openly admire the artists? The only one I can think of off-hand is Fan Fair in Nashville, for country music fans (and then it's the STAR versus the FANS - still not quite the same).

WHAT TYPES OF CONVENTIONS ARE AVAILABLE?

Conventions range in size and length, from very small shop-sponsored conventions that last a day or two, to international organization-sponsored events that span four days. Conventions are usually held over a weekend, and usually include contests (closed to official registrants only) and exhibit floors, where artists may be selling their merchandise or tattooing. The exhibit floor is usually open to the public on a one-day admission fee, for those who don't want to pay the extra fee of registering.

Most of the larger conventions are fairly well organized. While not in the same caliber as an academic conference (that might have many workshops, board meetings, poster sessions), convention organizers usually have arrangements with travel agencies and hotels, to provide a good deal for participants. This allows attendees to obtain a lower "convention rate" for both hotel and airfare.

Convention rates vary: Registration for a national four-day convention may run around \$30-\$40, less for a shorter convention. Daily admission passes usually sell for about \$10 per person and are only good for the day. Official registrants are usually given a color-coded hospital-style wristband, while those paying for just the day may get their hand stamped.

WHY WOULD I WANT TO ATTEND?

Have you ever wanted to get a tattoo from a certain artist who lives in another country, or another part of the country? Have you ever wanted to feel a sense of belonging with a group of people who understand your desire for tattoos?

People attend conventions for different reasons - the main thing to remember is that these conventions allow you the unique opportunity to be immersed in the tattooing world, where staring at other people's tattoos, or people staring at yours aren't meant as an insult or an offense.

You might have read and perused through tattoo magazines and thought "No way! These guys are way too radical for me!" Just remember that everybody was born naked with no tattoos or extra holes in their body. We're all the same, and there is no reason to feel intimidated by others who have bodmods. Also, remember that the magazines will often publish the most outlandish subjects. Otherwise, it's boring and not newsworthy! So sure, you'll see somebody with very bizarro tattoos or with 100 pierces on their body. So what? This is your opportunity to chat with them or otherwise find out what drives them!

You think bikers are too rough? Sure, they might be tough-looking; but they are some of the sweetest, friendliest people I've ever met! Word is, a lot of the convention and hotel staff come into these tattoo conventions with some trepidation, then discover, much to their delight, that the attendees are some of the most polite, fun-loving, nicest people around! If you have an appreciation for motorcycles, you'll find some fine examples in the parking lot. However, you'll discover that convention attendees run an entire gamut and that you can't pigeonhole them into any one classification.

IS A CONVENTION FOR EVERYBODY?

A kind word of warning here...if you love tattoos or are very intrigued by them, and you want to meet others of your ilk, the conventions are very good places to go. However, these conventions are not for everybody. For one thing, these conventions are mostly geared toward adults. Unless you are a tattoo artist and your toddler has lived her entire life among the heavily tattooed and pierced, this may be a very upsetting place to go. Those who are sensitive to smoke or asthmatic should know that the convention floor often becomes one big ashtray.

Finally, if you are trying to convince your partner to accept tattooing, and your partner gets very upset about the topic in the first place, the convention may be a very shocking and frightening experience that causes the opposite of what you want.

WHAT'S THE ATMOSPHERE LIKE?

Conventions are always pretty congenial and relaxed during the sessions that are open only to registrants. Welcome receptions usually allow time for a lot of socializing, where friends can catch up on old news and share their new tattoos with others. Quite a few people take their cameras along, snapping shots of tattoos and people. This period is also the time to see the real serious tattoo enthusiasts and artists, since these are the ones who usually register for the entire convention. This means that you are likely to see people with very serious pieces of custom work on their bodies.

The exhibit floor, when it is still closed to the public (usually on Fridays during a four-day convention) is not too crowded. If you want to get some work done from an artist who has rented a booth, Fridays are a good time to get it done. This would be a good opportunity to visit various booths and actually talk to people.

Once the weekend hits and the doors are opened to the public, the atmosphere will change greatly. You will see a lot of "gawkers" and various curiosity-seekers, who may or may not have any tattoos (or if they do, they might be some mediocre flash). The convention floor takes on somewhat of a carnival environment.

Attendance seems to depend largely on where the convention is being held. No tattoo convention is so large as to take up a city's major convention center- most conventions occur in hotel ballrooms. Thus if the hotel is in a rural section of town, or the convention is not appropriately advertised, you will not get a very high local turnout. On the other hand, well-advertised events will be so popular that they will have to limit the number of bodies in the room.

Note that the National Tattoo Association has a policy (which some regard as archaic) that bans facial and visible body piercings (outside of the ears) because it believes that these promote the side-show-freak atmosphere, which is not conducive to the mainstreaming of tattooing.

While I will not condone the purposeful breaking of any policy, I can state that I have seen enough various body piercings at NTA conventions that it seems if you keep it low key they will not bother you. With the current popularity of body piercing, I would like to counter that some pierces (eyebrows, navel, and nipple) have entered into the mainstream, and are now actually used in advertisements. I don't know why NTA still maintains this policy, when many tattooists have their own in-house piercers and the tattooists themselves often sport body pierces themselves.

WHAT KIND OF TATTOO CONTESTS ARE THERE?

Contests are limited to registrants during the larger conventions, while they may be open to everyone at the smaller ones. Categories seem to differ greatly, however some of the more standard ones you can expect include: best black & gray, most unusual, best tribal, best portrait, best overall.

Judging is done either by popular vote, or by a panel of experts (usually composed of veteran artists). Obviously those by popular vote are often judged by the contestant's looks or personality, and not necessarily just by their tattoo.

If you plan to attend a contest, I suggest you bring a pair of binoculars. The contestants are usually herded around on stage, and it is often difficult to see the tattoos well. This is especially pertinent if the contest is audience judged.

Some contests are better organized than others; however I have yet to see a contest where everything runs on time. Many contests do not limit the number of entrants in a category, or limit entrants to one category. This can cause long waits and long lines. If you wish to take photos of these contests, plan to bring a telephoto lens. A tripod would not be a bad idea either.

CAN I ACTUALLY GET A TATTOO AT A CONVENTION?

One of the biggest advantages of attending a convention is that you can book an appointment with a well-known artist who does not live near you. One of the biggest disadvantages of booking an appointment for the convention with a well-known artist who does not live near you is that you might not get as good a deal as you would if you were to visit the artist's studio. That is, the exhibit floor is noisy, full of smoke, crowded, and generally hard for anyone to concentrate in.

In addition, some artists try to pay for their trips and booth fees by the appointments they do during the convention - so the more tattoos they do, the more money they make. It is possible that you may be overcharged for a tattoo that is not up to the regular standards of the artist.

How to avoid this pitfall? Phone the artist WELL in advance. Explain your interests and reserve your time for the convention beforehand - the earlier the better. Give your artist enough time to do some rough sketches as well, that can be drawn up before the convention. If you have been dying to get a tattoo

from someone great and famous, why take the risks that the artist fills up that appointment book before you can get to that booth? Reserve in advance and avoid the headache.

Should you decide to "wing it" and hope to find someone you like once you're there, you will have a much better chance of securing a time slot if you visit before the public is admitted (which means you have to register for the convention). Chances are, they will want to get a deposit from you immediately (some people make appointments during conventions then fail to show without notifying the artist - very uncool! You have been warned, though. Caveat emptor.

WHAT ELSE CAN I FIND AT THESE CONVENTIONS?

Even if you don't plan on getting any tattoos, there is still plenty to do on the exhibit floor. Most booths sell merchandise; many booths give away stickers, business cards, etc. Chuck Eldridge from the Tattoo Archive in California usually has a booth at the larger conventions. If you've ever wanted to pick up an out-of-print publication on tattooing, visit his booth!

Ever wonder how people get their pictures into the tattoo magazines? In addition to photos submitted by the artists themselves, many of the photos are taken at the conventions! Keep an eye out for signs that identify tattoo magazines. Most of them set up portable studios in nearby rooms. You will be required to sign a standard model release form, and will have to inform them who your artist was (that's actually more important to them than your own name).

How to tell if the photos were taken at a convention? Take a look at the wrists of the models in the magazines. Do you see a color-coded hospital wristband? Does the background look like a professional backdrop, versus the inside of a tattoo shop?

Unfortunately, the magazine people won't be able to tell you if or when your photo will appear in publication. Most of the time, you just have to look at the issues that appear about three to four months after the convention. The only time they will phone you is when you get a major spread/feature, or if you've made the cover. If this is the case, payment usually comes in the form of extra copies. Ask for as many as you feel comfortable asking for (a couple dozen would not be out of line, although I wouldn't ask for 500 copies unless you had an incredibly large family).

Sometimes, the magazines will issue a special issue dedicated to the specific convention you were at. These often include candid and photos of contestants, and may include a photo of you! Many convention organizers also contract a video production group to tape the show. These are usually sold at an on-site booth.

In recent years, seminars geared towards artists have been added at larger conventions, with topics such as "Creative Coloring", Care and "Tuning your Machine", "Spit-Shading - Watercolor", and "Tribal Tattooing, Preventing Disease Transmission in Tattooing." Unfortunately, these are usually open only to professional artists. I would personally like to one day see sessions geared towards tattoo enthusiasts. Sessions focusing on disease transmission prevention from the customer's point of view, or the history of Polynesian tattooing, are two such examples.

TATTOOING AND TRAVELLING

Getting a tattoo at a convention poses a number of potential problems, especially if you are used to getting tattooed near your hometown. Of primary importance is the need to decrease your level of stress during your travel. Thanks go to "convention trooper" Michele DeLio, formerly of Tattoo magazine for some of these pointers.

VITAMINS: Begin taking vitamin supplements a few days prior to traveling to the convention. A multi-vitamin supplement is fine, although in particular, you are recommended to take vitamins B and C, and Zinc. Some people cannot tolerate zinc supplements alone - in which case a multi-vitamin supplement containing zinc would suffice. Pack enough tablets to last the duration of the trip.

NUTRITION: Without sounding too motherly, eat yer vegetables! Vegetables and fruits are particularly healthy and help cleanse your system prior to your trip. Your digestive system tends to go haywire on the road, so eating fiber (bran cereal, etc.) will also help. Stay away from particularly spicy or greasy foods while you are traveling as well.

WATER: Most importantly, you should drink what you might consider excessive amounts of water during your travel. Airplane cabins are notorious for their aridity (sometimes as low as 10% humidity), and most experienced travelers recommend that you drink eight ounces of water for every hour you are flying. This will help your body flush out toxins, and keep your skin fresh and hydrated for your new tattoo.

CLOTHING: Regardless of your mode of travel, if you are going to be on the road for many hours, try to bring clothing that will let your new tattoo breathe.

LEATHER: While a tattoo convention is a great place to look cool in your heavy duty black leather clothing, these do not pack well. Try to limit your heavy duty leather to just your jacket. If you must bring more, choose those which are lighter weight. Bring an extra large diaper pin (or a kilt pin), and use it to hang your jacket label up on the seat back in front of you on the plane. This way, you will have arm room in your seat, and will not have to risk having someone squash it with their vanity case in the overhead. Remember also that leather does not breathe well - if you are getting a tattoo, keep in mind that you will not want to wear leather over it.

MOISTURIZER: The air in the cabin is EXTRA dry - pack a moisturizer in your carry-on bag.

FRESH AIR: If you are a cigarette smoker, try to cut down on the amount you smoke while you travel. At the convention, try to get outdoors as often as possible - to get some natural light on your skin, as well as to breathe some fresh air. Unless the building is zoned as non-smoking, the convention floor will be a mass of ashtrays and smoke.

POOLS & HOT TUBS: If you are staying at a nice hotel for the convention, you'll notice the swimming pools and hot tubs. Enjoy them before, but not after your new tattoo. Your tattoo is simply too fresh to risk immersing in public water.

STRESS: Excitement and tension often accompany long-distance travel. Did you remember your airline ticket? Is your hotel room confirmed? Did you forget anything? Just remember that most things can be fixed in a pinch.

STRESS REDUCING TIPS

- Try to pack as little as possible, and take all your essentials with you in your carry-on
- Make sure to leave your complete itinerary, as well as photocopies of your tickets, with a trusted friend or relative.
- Most artists will accept traveler's checks as cash. Convert your cash to these handy checks prior to traveling. Record the check numbers, keep them separate from the checks themselves.

- Don't forget to confirm your flight 24 hours ahead, both before you leave, as well as a day before you go home.
- Make sure to jot down your hotel confirmation number. With this you should be guaranteed a room.
- Special meals on airplanes are HIGHLY recommended. These are available at no extra charge, and include things like ovo-lacto vegetarian (dairy/eggs), vegan (no dairy/eggs), Kosher, seafood, Hindu, low fat, low sodium. Airlines will differ on some things.

United offers McDonald's Happy Meals with a toy for the kids or kiddies-at-heart; American offers a Weight Watchers entree). My favorite is the fruit platter. Guaranteed to be the freshest meal, these usually include sliced melon, pineapple, grapes, and strawberries. Requests for special meals must be made 24 hours in advance. Special meals are served before all regular meals (remind your flight attendant prior to meal service).

- Wear ear plugs on the airplane to reduce engine noise. I prefer the squishy spongy ones that snuggle right into your ear canal. Remember that listening to your walkman will only mask the engine noise, not reduce it.
- Many travel stores carry inflatable neck pillows shaped like the letter "C" that crook your neck for napping. These will prevent your neck from getting stiff and sore.
- Always ask for a glass of water along with your drink. Or bring your own bottled water.
- Stay away from caffeine and alcohol during the flight. These will dehydrate your body and potentially give you a headache (which, if you remedy with an aspirin, would be a bad idea for getting your new tattoo).

TATTOO CARE KIT

If you get a new tattoo during the convention, it may be a few days before you get back to the tranquility of your home. Take along a "tattoo care kit" with you to begin caring for your new tattoo while you are still at the convention. I have outlined what I personally use when I travel (Johnson's baby products travel pack) in the "healing a new tattoo" section in the FAQ. I particularly recommend products that are very mild and/or hypoallergenic, so you have less chance of skin problems.

Many pharmacies and mega-marts sell one- or two-ounce travel bottles of soap, lotion, etc. I suggest you try some of them for a while on a test patch on your skin to make sure you are not allergic. Red, itchy swollen rashes due to an allergic reaction to skin lotion are not a nice way to be traveling with a new tattoo.

If you are going to be flying for many hours, you might want to find a way to cover your tattoo so it doesn't stick to your clothes. Any barrier is fine (tissue, handkerchief), but put this on before you fall asleep on your flight.

If you return home with your new tattoo and find that it is not healing as quickly, dab a little bit of antibiotic cream on it for a couple of days to see if it settles down. Whatever problems you're having with your tattoo are probably attributable to travel stress.

WHAT ARE SOME BAD THINGS FOR MY NEW TATTOO?

SAUNA OR STEAMROOM

Once it is healed, there is very little that will screw up a tattoo. The one exception is prolonged exposure to sunlight. (the other is scarring, but that is patently obvious).

SUNLIGHT

Well, unfortunately it is. The newer inks are better at resisting fading but whatever you do, if you spend lots of time in bright sunlight your tats will fade (over a lifetime, not over a week). Best to try and keep them out of bright sunlight. No one wants to become a cave dweller just to keep their tats looking good, so just use some common sense. Think of your tat as an investment - slather on that sunblock so it doesn't turn into a dark blob.

Our culture has erroneously labeled the tan as healthy. Did you know that your tan is your skin's way of dealing with the damage caused by the sun? It's like the formation of a scab when you have a cut. You will pay for your years of sun exposure when you are in your 40s and 50s. Leathery, wrinkled, dry skin with freckles and liver spots. Melanoma. Skin cancer. Regular visits to the dermatologist. Like I say, "There's no such thing as a healthy tan!" Take it from a Hawaii local! I've seen my share of melanoma here, and they're not even from surfers or beach bunnies!

Some people have gotten angry at me about this, telling me that they have a seasonal disorder that requires them to get some sun. A little bit of sun is okay (and it gives you a dose of Vitamin D). But all you need is a few minutes' worth.

Tanning booths are not good for you! They are not regulated by the FDA, and the staff that work at these salons have been known to give out patently false information. Many salon operators will suggest dosages far exceeding industry recommendations, and the FDA would actually prefer that these booths be banned altogether. Do not believe the salon operators who tell you there is NO damage caused by their UV rays. There are indications that tanning booths emit rays that cause the type of damage that only shows up years later, when it is difficult to fault any one operator. Their industry motto is "tan safe." There is no such thing as a SAFE tan, folks. Sorry.

Kai says: IT IS TRUE THAT SUNTANNING TO A CONSIDERABLE EXTENT NOT ONLY DAMAGES YOUR SKIN BUT FADES THE TATTOOS. The UV light rays that damage skin can get below the outermost surface of the skin (that's why skin cancers are promoted by excess suntanning).

The following is information about suncare and sunblock, as well as some specific brand recommendations.

- Try to use products that do not clog your pores. If your sunblock makes you break out or feel itchy, this may be the cause.
- Avoid sunblock containing PABA, apparently found to be carcinogenic.
- "SPF" stands for Sun Protection Factor. If you can normally stay out for ten minutes without getting sunburnt, then an SPF 2 should protect you for 20 minutes, an SPF 6 for an hour, and so on. HOWEVER, this does NOT mean an SPF 30 will let you stay out for five hours with just one coat. Keep your exposure limited to the minimum amounts, and always use an extra strong sunblock with at least SPF 30 for your tattoo.
- "Waterproof" and "sweatproof" sunblocks protect you while in the water. However, reflections from the water add to your exposure. Make sure you use a high SPF number, and always re-apply your sunblock when coming out of the water.

- Sunblock is not just for the beach! Make it a habit to carry one with you during the sunnier months so you can protect your tattoo always! The Watermelon Stick from the Body Shop is nice and portable, but in a pinch, a tube of lip balm (Blistik, etc.) will work, as long as it has an SPF. Dab a bit on your tattoo whenever you will be outside.

Products recommended:

- Banana Boat for Kids - SPF 50.
- Banana Boat's SPF 50, for Extra Sensitive Skin
- "Deep Cover" Super Sunblock, advertised in some tattoo magazines (distributed by Deep Cover in Calif.)
- The Body Shop's Watermelon Stick
- Bullfrog Moisturizing Formula - The Body Lotion (not the Gel Formula).
- Neutrogena's Sensitive Skin SPF 17
- Schering-Plough's "Shade Sunblock" in various SPFs.

PREPARATION-H HEMORRHOIDAL OINTMENT

We have heard stories of tattoo artists recommending the use of Preparation-H in the healing of new tattoos. Preparation-H is a product marketed for the relief of hemorrhoid tissue in the US, and comes in both cream and suppository form (I assume artists don't recommend the suppositories).

Dr. Jeff Herndon resident assistant professor at the Department of Medicinal Chemistry at Virginia Commonwealth University's Medical College says Preparation-H should NOT be used for tattoos:

According to the 1995 Drug Facts & Comparisons (Olin, et al., Facts and Comparisons Inc.: St Louis, 1995; p 540-541) the list of ingredients for Preparation-H are as follows:

- Live yeast cell derivative supplying 2000 units of skin respiratory factor per ounce
- 3% shark liver oil
- 1:10000 phenyl mercuric nitrate

Facts and Comparisons goes on to say that shark liver oil (similar to cod liver oil) is used primarily as a carrier of the active ingredient and as a protectant, forming a physical barrier on the skin. While this may be helpful in the healing of hemorrhoids, it provides no benefit and perhaps impedes the healing of new tattoos.

Furthermore, while phenyl mercuric nitrate may have antiseptic properties (similar to mercurichrome or tincture of iodine; neither of which should be used on fresh tattoos) it possesses very little anti-infective properties when compared to traditional antibacterial agents (neosporin, bacitracin, etc.). Its use in such low quantities in Preparation-H is possibly as a preservative (Facts and Comparisons, 1995, p. 540).

The active ingredient of Preparation-H is the skin respiratory factor and this does nothing to relieve the itching and/or swelling associated with a new tattoo. In fact, it is best to simply keep the area moist and clean and to avoid picking the scabs or 'onion skin peel' that develop - and refrain from using Preparation-H. Not only will it NOT help your tattoo, it will actually probably do more harm than good. The product was developed for hemorrhoidal tissue only. I just can't figure why you'd want to spread yeast cells on a tattoo.

HOW DO I CARE FOR MY NEW TATTOO?

The artist that did your tattoo will have something very definite to say about the care of your new tattoo, and it is probably a good idea to listen to him/her. Many shops will have an information sheet listing care instructions.

The information provided in this section may or may not be the same method your artist offers. Regardless, there are three things to remember about caring for your new tattoo:

- Moisturize it
- Don't over moisturize it
- And whatever you do, don't pick your onion peel scabs!

Basically, as long as you follow these three points, you will be okay. However as people get more tattoos; they begin trying out slightly different methods. I have included several examples, and not all of them will work on everybody. Some people will find that they are allergic to some products. For example, I have always had a problem with Noxzema skin cream, which makes me break out with water-filled pimple-like things on my skin.

How do you know which method is best for you? It depends on the type of skin you have, and how sensitive it is. I suggest you try a patch test on your skin for a week or so to see if you react to the ingredients.

Having said that, I have personally discovered a very nice "new tattoo kit" that I now use whenever I go to get a tattoo. And the added benefit was that I discovered this "kit" in a sample size travel set, which I can easily pack in my travel bag.

The set that I now use is the Johnson's baby product line. The kit includes baby powder, baby shampoo, diaper rash ointment, baby lotion, baby bath, and a bonus (in this case, a baby bib). I don't need the baby bib, and the shampoo is just an added bonus for me. However, this is how I use the kit, especially when I'm getting the tattoo in another city:

Baby powder: I sprinkle a liberal amount on the hotel bed sheets to prevent my skin from sticking to the sheet.

Baby bath: A fruity-smelling liquid soap, it's very mild and has minimal lathering. I pour a bit on my hand, rub into a light lather and wash the tattoo this way. It rinses off very easily with non-pressurized water, minimizing the risk of losing scabs.

Baby lotion: The Johnson's brand feels non-greasy. MY skin does not like a layer of oily lotion, and until this, I used to pay lots of money for oil-free Oil of Olay (is that a contradiction in terms?). Goes on very lightly but keeps the skin moist.

Diaper rash ointment: Zinc oxide-based, I use this thick, non- greasy ointment on certain "contact spots" of my tattoo that may rub against clothes (i.e. bra strap, waist band).

I've found this travel kit selling for \$2-\$3 (US), and the small sizes work out just right for a smaller tattoo (no larger than 8"x8". You MIGHT smell like a clean baby, though!

Other people will recommend different ointments and lotions. Some people swear by Tea Tree Oil (toner) from the Body Shop for its healing qualities. Others like A&D Ointment (marketed for diaper rash, I find it somewhat greasy), and the cheapest is probably regular Vaseline Intensive Care. If you live in a dry area and you're prone to use a lot of lotion anyway, the last one, in a large pump bottle, may be your best bargain.

This section lists treatments to give you an idea of the breadth of suggestions offered. These have been given "titles" using some unique facet of the method, and are thus named only for the sake of convenience. These methods are NOT actually called these. Each set of instructions is followed by commentary.

*Special thanks to Lance Bailey for this section.

MINIMAL MOISTURIZER METHOD ANCIENT ART TATTOO

Ancient Art puts a heap of Vaseline on the new tattoo and then bandages up the whole thing, they give you these instructions:

Tattoo Care Instructions:

1. Remove band aid in 18 hrs.
2. Wash tattoo immediately, with soap and water. When washing off the tattoo, there should be old ink & some body fluids. At this state there is little that can harm the tattoo.
3. When skin feels like normal wet skin, pat dry.
4. Put nothing on the tattoo for 3 days.
5. From the 4th day, apply the tiniest amount of lotion possible once a day to keep it from drying out completely; gently work it in.
6. Do not get the tattoo wet; moisture is your enemy.
7. Do not permit sun on tattoo.
8. Do not get the tattoo wet; moisture is your enemy.
9. Scabbing may or may not occur. Scabbing is normal. Do not pick scab.
10. Do not get the tattoo wet; moisture is your enemy.

His strongest advice: "MOISTURE IS THE TATTOO'S ENEMY".

On using Vaseline: Neosporin is Vaseline-based, & doesn't hurt.

On using Neosporin: Not really necessary, but it doesn't hurt.

Strong warning: Never let the shower directly hit the tattoo.

This procedure is how I healed the four I got at Ancient Art and they seem to be the slowest to heal. After 2.5 weeks, they still have scabs.

Lance Bailey says: I used to go to great lengths to keep my tattoos moist while healing. But now, looking at the ink I healed then and other art which is not much older but healed without all the moisture, I see that the ones where I kept it real moist to prevent any scabs are a lot fainter - grey where the others are still black. I quite literally drew a lot of the ink out of the piece. Yes, it is important to keep the tattoo from drying out, but a scab is part of the normal healing process, and trying to fool Mother Nature is risking trouble. Your mileage will of course vary.

THE HUCK SPALDING METHOD - HUCK SPALDING'S "TATTOOING A TO Z"

1. Bandage (*) should stay on for at least two hours.
2. Remove bandage, rinse gently with cold water and blot dry.
3. Apply Bacitracin ointment 4 x a day and blot out the excess.
4. Keep tattoo fresh and open to the air. Do not bandage.
5. For the first week, avoid swimming or long soaking in the water.
6. For the first month, avoid too much exposure to the sun.
7. Do not pick or scratch scabs
8. Itching is relieved by slapping or alcohol.
9. Keep tattoo covered with loose clothing.

* Bandaging Summary

1. After tattooing clean whole area w/ green soap & white paper towel.
2. Spray it with alcohol and hold a paper towel on it.
3. Apply film of Bacitracin ointment.
4. Cover with bandage or Handi-Wrap and securely tape it on.

I have yet to try this method, but have seen a few tattoos which have been bandaged with handi-wrap and they turned out just fine. (Huck writes that the handi-wrap stops people from peeling off the bandage in the first few hours to show friends.)

THE NOXZEMA METHOD FROM LANCE BAILEY

This method is recommended by Suzanne at Creative Tattoo (Ann Arbor, Michigan)

1. Remove bandage after 4 - 5 hours.
2. Wash gently with soap or water.
3. Do NOT scrub or soak until completely healed (usually a week). Showering, however, is OK.
4. Usually necessary to re-bandage.
5. Keep tattoo OUT OF THE SUN or tanning booths while healing. Once healed, ALWAYS use sunscreen on colors.
6. We recommend Noxema Medicated Skin Lotion twice a day to aid healing & comfort. DO NOT USE Vaseline, oils, anything greasy, or anything with cortisone. Oils block your skin from contact with air, inhibiting healing
7. Tattoo "peels" in 4-7 days. Do not pick or scratch!

"Your tattoo was applied with sterile equipment and procedure, and with non-toxic colors. We guarantee the workmanship. Healing and caring of your tattoo is YOUR responsibility."

This is how I healed a 3-inch band around my right ankle. While the healing was more like 2 weeks, I also protected it from the shower with a bag. For the last few tattoos I noticed that after I stop covering it in the shower (after about 2 weeks), the tattoo seems to speed up in healing. I suspect that this might be either timing (it was ready to heal), or the action of the shower helps to knock off any dead skin thus promoting better healing.

I only used a wee bit of Noxzema twice a day, leaving the art "moist and glistening" but with no "smears of white cream." Am very happy with this method. The cream really does help the itching and the final result is a good deep black.

THE FAQ MAINTAINER'S OWN METHOD

1. Remove the bandage and shower that night.
2. Wash gently with soap or water.
3. Apply A&D or some such petroleum-jelly-based ointment before bed and again the next morning.
4. Apply lotion the second night and then twice a day for a week. Lotions I like are the Vaseline Intensive Care line and Lubriderm.

I've healed lots of tattoos with this basic care regimen. The only other caution I have is that I usually wear something to cover the tattoo the first night. Not necessarily a bandage, but just a T-shirt or something like that to keep from sticking to the sheets.

HOW DOES WEIGHT GAIN/LOSS AFFECT A TATTOO?

Tattoos can definitely be affected by stretch marks. Whether you will or won't get stretch marks is apparently determined genetically, so placement is a consideration if you are planning on getting pregnant. I know for a fact that stretch marks can ruin a tattoo, because I have a very small tattoo that

now looks more like a blob because of a large stretch mark running through the middle of it. Luckily, this was a home-brewed job (the kind done with India ink and a pin wrapped in thread) so I was never particularly attached to the artwork. :-}

If your skin stretches from weight gain and then shrinks back up without losing its elasticity (the loss of elasticity is what results in stretch marks), then I would expect that there wouldn't be much distortion of the tattoo, maybe none at all.

Or, put the tattoo someplace that won't get stretched so much, like the chest area above the breasts. My upper stomach didn't stretch much, either, but the lower abdominal skin did stretch quite a lot. (I've seen stretch marks on hips, thighs and arms as well - probably related to muscle gain from weight lifting as well as general fattening/thinning.)

HOW DOES LIFTING WEIGHTS AFFECT A TATTOO?

For most people, the amount of muscle gain is nowhere near as quick or as dramatic as what you would see with the stretching of skin on a pregnant person. For this reason, you don't really have to worry about your tattoo changing shape when you start lifting weights. I don't know what would happen though, if you decide you want to be the next Mr. Universe and you currently weigh 90 pounds.

HOW DOES PREGNANCY AFFECT A TATTOO NEAR THE ABDOMEN?

If you are planning on getting pregnant, you should be very cautious about the placement of any tattoo near the abdominal area. Not only will the tattoo stretch during pregnancy - there is no guarantee that the tattoo will go back to its original shape after the birth of your baby.

Be particularly wary of getting any tattoo where the shape is important, such as with symmetrical tribal pieces, or Celtic knots. Even geometric patterns such as a circle could end up looking like an oval (or worse, an irregular blob). A more "giving" image, such as that of clouds, might suit you better.

There are two options you might want to consider: a) Do not get any tattoos around the abdominal area at all, but limit your ink to other parts of your torso; b) Put off getting your abdominal tattoos until after you have had your children. Obviously, this involves some level of family planning.

CAN A TATTOO BE REMOVED?

There are several methods for "removing" a tattoo, listed below. However with all of these methods, you either still end up with a tattoo (albeit a better-looking one), a scar, or a skinnier wallet. In other words, it is much easier to get a tattoo in the first place than to get rid of one. If you are considering getting a new tattoo, think carefully before you do - or you may end up re-reading this section.

IMPORTANT Most health insurance companies do not cover tattoo removal in their coverage. The removal of a small tattoo (2-inch square) could end up costing you over \$1,000 - and there are "hidden costs" to the concept of tattoo removal. The bottom line is, **TATTOO REMOVAL IS VERY EXPENSIVE**. This means that it is extra-important for you to consider **CAREFULLY** and spend a long time considering getting one in the first place.

GET IT REWORKED - COVERED UP

There are different ways to get cover-up work, depending on the situation. A name can be tastefully camouflaged with a small design, making the name impossible to read. If it's the entire thing you want covered, it could be covered with another design. It is easier to cover a lighter color with a darker color, although oftentimes the original work is done in a dark color.

This means not just a good tattooist, but a really good artist; what they'll have to do is find a way to work the existing tattoo into a new design that will cover and disguise what's there. If you don't believe that good cover-up work can do magic, take a look at some of the before-after photos in some of the tattoo magazines. The artists know how to work with form and shape, to where the new tattoo looks nothing like the old one.

An example of BAD cover-up is an artist who simply blacks out whatever was there before. I've seen big black rectangles where names used to be. This is a rather inelegant way of covering an unwanted tattoo. The main idea is to check with the individual artist. If they've done significant cover-up work, they should have before and after photos of it in their book, where you can see where the work occurred.

GET IT REWORKED - TOUCH-UPS

With the advances in technology, technique and the availability of new, brighter colors in the past few years, faded or blurred tattoos can look brighter and sharper than when they were new. Some touch-up work makes the tattoo significantly better looking than it ever was, actually improving on the original tattoo.

GET IT REMOVED - TISSUE EXPANSION

The tissue expansion method is where a balloon is inserted and inflated under the skin to slowly stretch the flesh. The tattoo is then cut out and the newly stretched skin covers its place. This is a popular method for removing smaller tattoos and leaves only a straight-line surgical scar.

GET IT REMOVED - SAL ABRASION

Sal abrasion involves rubbing the image with salt and "sanding" it out.

GET IT REMOVED - STAGED EXCISION

The staged excision method actually cuts the image out, a small portion at a time. Both the sal abrasion and staged excision methods result in more scarring. Also, homemade tattoos can be more difficult to remove because while the concentration of ink may not be as great as in a professional tattoo, it often goes deeper into the skin (you may want to consider cover-up work in this case).

Monese Christensen recounts a rather sad story about her sister, who, on a whim without finding a good artist, got a tattoo she regretted enough to try to get it removed. "The saline expansion took about 4 months. The insertion of the saline bag was major surgery. They put her out. And put her out again to remove the tattoo and bag. The surgery was not covered under insurance for cosmetic reasons and it came to \$5,000." Note that for six months Monese's sister had a big lump of extra skin growing on her back and she looked like Quasimodo. This, I believe, for a tattoo about 2" x 2".

GET IT REMOVED - MEDICAL LASERS

There are a number of new laser methods for tattoo removal, although they tend to be costly and are usually not covered by medical insurance plans. Of the three forms of medical lasers currently available (the CO2 laser, the Q-switched ruby laser and the Tatulazr), the new Tatulazr has been deemed one of the most effective ways to remove blue-black tattoos.

According to Dr. Richard Fitzpatrick of Dermatology Associates of San Diego County (who is the clinical investigator for the Tatulazr), the Tatulazr delivers pulses of energy that are selectively absorbed by the pigment granules of the tattoo. He says that the Tatulazr's wavelength causes less absorption of the laser light by the normal skin, resulting in less risk of scarring. The longer wavelength allows more energy to reach the target tattoo pigment, resulting in greater removal success. In addition, the wavelength allows for deeper penetration into the skin, which means fewer treatments may be required for complete tattoo removal.

PROGRAMS FOR TATTOO REMOVAL IN JUVENILES

In a news conference held in April '94, San Jose Mayor Susan Hammer announced a new program that would help young people to remove unwanted tattoos. \$15,000 from the San Jose BEST anti-gang grant program will pay for the tattoo removal from about 100 people. Hammer said she will seek additional funding.

"I want to send a message to every young person troubled by the presence of a tattoo," Hammer said. "This program is about you and about your dream." The service is being provided by plastic surgeon Josh Korman, who is donating his time.

Another program to remove juveniles' tattoos is funded by the California Youth Authority. People under 25 can have tattoos removed in exchange for performing 30 hours of community service. In Southern California, this program is administered by the Hollywood Sunset Free Clinic. Information about this can be found at:

<http://www.hollywoodsunsetfreeclinic.org/Code/Tattooserv.html>

ONE PERSON'S DECISION TO TATTOO REMOVAL

The following is a personal account by Cindy Browning of her decision to have her tattoos removed professionally.

I started getting tats at 24 with a very small shoulder piece. I dated and ended up marrying a self-professed (now professional) tattoo artist, and got more pieces, all blackwork. The marriage ended, and I was left with a lot of tat work; some good but most, painful reminders.

I had heard of tat removal, but these rumors were usually prefaced by "It hurts a lot, worse than the tat, it doesn't always work, and it's incredibly expensive." I saw the results of a removal on a friend of mine - she had a racist symbol on her hand, and her mom sent her to have it removed for around \$500. (Being married to the artist, none of my tats had cost anything - you get what you pay for.)

I decided to go with cover-up work. Got several pieces from '89-91, blackwork and color, all by recognized professionals I knew. Some of the nicest ones I got were around my ankles - Egyptian-themed pieces from historical sources, a tribal tiger head from a book catalogue. My job was extremely

unconventional - a retail store manager specializing in jewelry, minerals, and the occult. Located in a very hip, trendy area of Washington D.C., celebrities walked in regularly. The store owner encouraged us to be interesting-looking, and tats fit with the fashion-forward clothes that we wore.

I left my job abruptly in '91, and used my computer skills to enter the extremely rigid, conservative world of government consulting. At first it was easy to cover up with black hose, long sleeves, and blazers, but this became increasingly constrictive. I began dreaming of wearing shorts, white hose, sleeveless shirts, bathing suits, anything, without being a one-woman free tattoo show. My life changed. My rock & roll friends were bored with my stories of work, not impressed that I was earning money, driving a new car and living on my own instead of in grimy group houses.

New friends made judgments about me once they found out I had tattoos. Romance was difficult - there was always the "I have.....tattoos" conversation to go through. There are surprising numbers of unenlightened men out there who think you are a) sleazy b) ready for sex at ANY time c) perverted d) into "pain" e) gross f) all of the above if you have tats. I think I met all of them in the D.C. area.

One approached me on the mall on July 4th when I was celebrating freedom in my own personal way by wearing a tank top. He ran his slimy finger down my tattooed upper arm and said, "Pretty" in a Hannibal Lecter voice. I ran away. I think it was then that I began my soul-searching, before searching for doctors who could effectively remove tattoos, starting with my ankle pieces. My search was futile. I met at least one dermatologist who was really nice 'til I took off my shirt, at which point I believe she thought I was a candidate for Psychotic Monthly.

I did eventually meet a man who said he didn't care if I had tats, but had none of his own. But those T-shirt aphorisms you read about non-tattooed people are true. We were driving past a boutique one night, and there was a velvet sheath dress in the window, cut up to here and down to there. He looked at me sadly and said how he wished I could wear it. I said, "Huh?" as I am not overweight by any means. I then realized what he really meant, that he wished I did not look like the missing 5th member of the Cycle Sluts from Hell in the dress. Groan.

I did so well that I was offered a new position and a promotion at a new office in San Antonio. I grabbed it. Upon arriving and perusing the local rock & roll paper, I saw an ad that read "Married to Mary Lou but still have Debbie on your arm?", advertising the Laser Institute of San Antonio. I called, made an appointment, and went as soon as I could. The doctor (Dr. Marc Taylor) was very friendly, if a bit surprised by my tat work, but said he could help me. I saw a short video that showed results that looked miraculous. He warned that scarring could occur, and with professional tats, several treatments were necessary, scarring one's pocketbook as well.

But I didn't care. All I could see was a rainbow, with white stockings and shorts and sandals at the end. Let me tell you, not wearing shorts in Texas in the summer makes you look like un-American. And I have no wish to look like someone's dad, or the Captain of the Love Boat, with dorky ankle socks.

Now, you might say that individualism is prized in Texas. But after years of having tattoos, I stopped caring about what others think, and am concerned with my own comfort level.

So far I have had one treatment. It went on for about 20 minutes, and felt somewhat like getting a tattoo, but more like a rubber band snapping on my skin. The machine is about 2 feet high and has a probe on a mechanical arm coming out of it, sort of like a dental drill. There's a pen-shaped attachment on the end, and a plastic shield (to keep the laser from shooting all over the room). The doctor, the attendant nurse and I all had to wear eye protection. The pen attachment shoots out little bursts of light, accompanied by an unpleasant crackling noise.

The initial consultation was \$45.00, and each 15-minute treatment is \$195.00 (with incremental amounts added for every additional minute. It was \$240 for 19 minutes. Aftercare is exactly the same as that for a tattoo, with 6-8 weeks between treatments. The results from my first treatment; there are

areas where the tats have completely disappeared, although I was advised that this might not happen on every try.

ARE THERE GLOW-IN-THE-DARK INKS OR FLUORESCENT INKS?

Fluorescent ink is not the same as glow-in-the-dark ink. Fluorescent inks glow under ultraviolet light. Phosphorescents glow after being exposed to light, and glow-in-the-dark things that glow without any outside stimulus are almost unknown.

For a brief time around 1991, some tattoo artists experimented with fluorescent inks that glow under UV light. At the time, it was thought that these could be used to make tattoos that would only be visible under UV light. As it turned out, these inks did not perform as expected. They were not invisible under normal light, and in some cases turned brown. At the same time, many people reported skin irritation problems. As a result, we are not currently aware of any tattoo artists still using these inks.

There is a collection of information about these inks at:

<http://www.bme.freeq.com/spc/experiences/glow/>

WHAT COLORS ARE AVAILABLE?

There are a lot more colors available now than just "Popeye green and red." Just about every color imaginable can be obtained for your design. If your artist does not have a pre-mixed color, s/he will mix the colors on the spot for you. It is not an exaggeration to say that you could specify your design by Pantone color, especially since many artists have fine arts degrees and are familiar with the various Pantone shades. Pantone shades are used by professional artists and are standard numbered colored.

ARE THERE GOLD OR SILVER INKS FOR TATTOOS?

While there are some metallic inks available, these are very rare and a general answer to this question is a simple "no." If you have a design that needs to look metallic, a good artist can use other colors to make it look metallic without actually using gold or silver ink. My understanding is that artists shy away from metallic colors because of their toxic properties under the skin.

CAN I GET A WHITE INK TATTOO?

Most artists use white ink to highlight certain parts of your tattoo design. However, white ink is a special color that requires your artist to work closely with you. The effect of white ink differs greatly among clients, and its visibility and retention on the skin has much to do with the natural coloration of your skin.

White ink seems to work best on very light-skinned people. Unfortunately, this means people with dark skin would not be able to get a white ink tattoo on their skin to have a "photo negative effect" that looks like a negative of a dark colored tattoo on light skin. This is because the ink sits under your skin, and the layer of skin over the ink is tinted with your natural skin color. So if you have very dark skin, the white will be overwhelmed with your natural melanin.

Those who have very light skin however, may use white ink exclusively to get tattoo designs that are very difficult to discern at first glance. This might be an interesting option for ankle or wrist tattoos, or

other areas where a regular non-white tattoo would show up too easily and possibly cause problems for the wearer.

WHERE CAN I GET JAPANESE "IREZUMI" TATTOOS?

Japanese "Irezumi" tattoos are often associated with laborers (primarily fire fighters and carpenters) and yakuza members, who stereotypically also lack the tips of one or two digits on their hands (to signify a failed order and to show loyalty - see the movie, *Black Rain* with Michael Douglas for an example). An excellent book to see examples of traditional Japanese bodysuits is *The Japanese tattoo* by Sandi Fellman (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986. 112 p.).

For those interested in getting work of this magnitude done however, the general answer is "ya can't gets one." This is not only because of the time or costs involved - there is a sense of the spiritual and of propriety with the artists, who do not advertise their services in the Yellow Pages.

Your best bet as a "gaijin" (foreigner) is to find a Western artist who specializes in oriental artwork. As trends go, the young Japanese are now interested in tattoos of Elvis and Chevies, anyway - the grass is greener on the other side, I guess. If you can manage to attend the larger tattoo conventions, some of the Japanese artists now travel the U.S. convention circuit regularly.

KANJI [CHINESE/JAPANESE] CHARACTERS

One word of warning about getting Japanese or Chinese characters - make sure that the artist who does this understands the importance of the shape and form of the letters. Unlike the Roman alphabet, the essence of the Oriental characters is in the proper execution of form. The artist will have to know where the "brush strokes" of the calligraphy start and end (since stroke order also counts), as well as how angular some corners should be, etc. The worst thing would be to sport a Japanese kanji character that looks like some zygotes.

How to tell if the characters are formed properly? It would help if you know how to read kanji or if you have Asian friends - otherwise, go with a reputable artist who is known for it. Beware: I read Japanese, and most of the kanji flash I've seen in shops are embarrassing to look at.

Brendan Mahoney adds:

Even were I to consider getting a kanji tattoo, mere copying just doesn't cut it (no pun intended). Chinese, like Japanese, has printing (e.g. in books), hand printing (which can be very artistic) and various forms of cursive (extremely artistic), not to mention styles - something like fonts - within each of the forms or writing. The most important aspect of fine cursive (aside from form and proportion) is what the Chinese call "flying white," that is, the white streaks created from moving the brush so rapidly. Creating a tattoo like that would require considerable shading skill in addition to appreciation for the flying white itself.

WHEN DID TATTOOING START?

Paraphrased from the Globe and Mail (Toronto's National Newspaper):

A 4,000 year old man has been found in Italy near the Austrian border, (originally it was reported he was in Austria, but both countries now agree he is in Italy.) Carbon dating will take a few months, but

artifacts found near him strongly suggest that he is over 4,000 years old...He is also tattooed...a small cross is behind one knee and above his kidneys there are a series of lines, about 15 cm long.

Apparently, this account is not quite correct, as later dating placed the Ice Man's age at closer to 5,300 years. Now I knew that the Egyptians tattooed each other, but that was only 3,000 years ago. I wonder how much further back this custom goes?

From "Tattoo You" by Steve Wind (Off Duty Hawaii Magazine, October '92):

"The first Western references to tattoos didn't come until 1771, when Captain Cook brought the word to Europe after seeing the art form in Tahiti. Tattoos were associated with the lower class and criminal elements in Britain and America until the early 1900s when, drawn by a sense of freedom, decadence and sexual liberation, upper classes began wearing them as well."

The word "tattoo" apparently comes from the Tahitian word "tatau," which was onomatopoeic for the sound their tattooing instrument made. The word was brought back by Captain Cook.

HOW DOES A MODERN TATTOO MACHINE WORK?

I'd like to thank Fred Jewell who did this entire section, except the diagram [which took me some time], and the needle arrangements, which is by Jesster. Please note that this information is not for the purpose of teaching people how to tattoo, but to assist in the public in becoming a more well-informed customer.

The tattoo machine ('gun' is a misnomer) is really a basic doorbell circuit (you know - you push a button and somewhere in the kitchen this little arm bangs the hell out of a bell thingie). For you techies out there it's a DC coil and spring point(s) machine. Both doorbell and tat machine were invented before household current was available.

It is essentially in 3 sections: The base, the mechanism, and the sanitary tube. The base really is the bulk of the metal; a rabbit ear with a screw in it, bent at 90 degrees to hold coils. In the front there's a round hole to hold the sanitary tube.

Some people think the base looks like the handle of a gun. The base houses the mechanism, which consists of two coils of wire wrapped around an iron core. At the top of the mechanism is a set of silver contact "points" (like the end of a wire); one usually on a spring mechanism, the other either the end, or on the end of a screw.

The spring connects to the base and a bar, which is connected to the needle arm (90 degrees offset). The needle arm is connected to the needles (which are soldered onto the bar), and moves up and down inside the sanitary tube.

The coils connect to a DC power supply (between 6 - 12VDC), via a spring coiled U-cable. The U-cable is called a "clip cord," designed to move easily between machines but also stay in place and not fall out and spark all over the place. The springs hold the cable in/onto the machine.

One side of the coils is connected to the power supply, the other end to the point on the screw on the bunny ear, which is insulated from the base. Through the points, the current flows via the coils and the base of the machine. This causes the coils to become electromagnetic. The electro-magnet pulls down the bar, which does two things: pulls down the needles, and opens the points. The points being open turn off the magnet. The spring assembly brings back the bar, which causes the needles to move up AND make contact with the points. This causes the whole cycle to happen again making the needles go up and down.

Most machines have a large capacitor across the coils/points, which keep the points from arcing and pitting, and wearing out so quickly. A capacitor is a device that holds energy kind of like a battery, but charges and discharges much faster (parts of a second rather than 3 or 4 hours). The capacitor charges while the points are open, so when they close, the difference in voltage across them is nil. The points are really an automatic switch controlled by the spring to turn the thing off and on quickly. In old cars where there were points there was a condenser (aka capacitor) for the same reason.

The sanitary tube sucks up the ink in capillary fashion, and the needles load up as long as there's ink in the small portion of the tube. It's called "sanitary" because of the cutout at the bottom of the tube, which can be rinsed out.

My understanding is that there are three layers of skin: Scaly layer, epidermis, and dermis. Tattoo machines are adjusted to penetrate into the dermis layer but NOT through it (below it is the fat layer of the body).

When the needles go into the sanitary tube they have a layer of ink on and between them. The needles make little holes in the skin, and the ink is deposited into the holes. This is why the skin has to be stretched so blobs of ink don't stay. Otherwise, the skin will latch onto the needles, grab the ink from them and generally make a mess.

Ink just put into the scaly layer would be replaced quickly and fade away. While ink into the epidermis will stay, my conjecture is that the dermis makes for more ink and perhaps a more vivid image. Machines are really of two types: Liners, and shaders. They are exactly the same, but are set up differently. The gap for a liner is around the thickness of a dime, and a shader is the thickness of a nickel.

Liner needles are usually arranged on the bar in a circular pattern. Shader needles are usually straight (like a comb), although Spaulding & Rogers sells a 15-needle round shader. The needles are small sewing machine needles, usually made of stainless steel. Liners are in 1, 3, 4, 5, & 7-needle combinations, set in a round configuration. Note: There can really be any number of them but these seem to be most common.

Shader needles are in a straight row and usually are in groups of 4, 6, 7, 9 needles. The sanitary tubes are designed especially for the combination of needles, so there's a special tube for each different number of needles in a needle bar assembly. Shaders are mounted on flat needle bars while liners are mounted on round bars

There are two other types of machines. Spaulding & Rogers revolution (don't know of an artist that uses this one), which is a DC motor that turns a cam that raises and lowers the needle bar assembly through a sanitary tube. The other is something that I have never seen (even in pictures) but they are used in prison and are made of tape recorder motors, and for the life of me I don't know how they work.

DO TATTOO NEEDLES BECOME DULL WITH USE?

The following information is provided by Uncle Bud

Tattoo needles do not dullen with age, but instead become sharper by the repetitive honing motion they experience in the tattoo machine. This happens because the metal of the sanitary tube rubs against the needles, and the softer metal (the needles) will wear. The problem with these sharpened needles is that they sharpen into flat razor-like edges, and begin cutting the skin instead of piercing small holes.

Since a tattoo is created by the conical shape of the needle transferring pigment into the skin with the aid of a wetting agent, the needle's shape is as important as its sharpness. Pigment does not transfer into the skin as efficiently when the shape is altered, and can also lead to scarring.

Another problem with needles is the occurrence of burs or barbs when the needles hit the side or bottom of the pigment caps. While it is possible to use the same set of needles for more than eight hours (on the same client, of course), correct needle configuration, setup, and alignment of the needle and machine are very critical.

HOW LONG DO I HAVE TO WAIT BEFORE I CAN DONATE BLOOD?

The standard question they always ask at blood banks is whether you've had a piercing or tattoo within the last 12 months. A lot of discussion has been made over RAB about some centers allowing for exceptions and whatnot, but it looks like the general consensus is that you have to wait 12 months. I assume this is to wait out any incidence of hepatitis or HIV.

Jonathan Allan says the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN won't take you if you have had:

1. Sex w/ another male since 1977 (male to male);
2. Sex w/ someone from the subtropics islands or sub-Saharan Africa since 1977;
3. Sex for money or drugs EVER;
4. Sex w/ someone who had sex w/ one of the above EVER;
5. ANY piercing or tattoo in the last 12 months.

TATTOOS AND ALLERGIES

Josephine Valencia, on allergies to certain inks:

The red reaction affects approximately 1 in every 100,000 to 300,000 people. It is characterized by itching and sometimes swelling depending on how severe the case. This usually happens 3 to 5 years after the tattoo, although cases have been reported as early as a few months and as late as 20 years.

Remedies usually involve OTC lotion or in more severe cases, medication prescribed by a dermatologist. No one seems to know what causes it and is associated usually only with the color red.

About 25 (?) years ago most red pigments contained mercury and the red reaction was much more common. It was widely believed that mercury was the cause. Mercury is no longer used in tattoo inks. Red reaction incidences decreased dramatically but were not eliminated.

Dr. Kai Kristensen on other causes for allergic reactions states:

Anything that the needles must go through to drive the ink into the dermis can be carried with the ink into the skin - and some people are blessed with a high degree of reaction to foreign material.

Most tattoo artists use a petroleum jelly based ointment as a lubricant on the surface of the skin and tattoo through that layer. In some persons, driving any of that into the skin sets up a foreign body reaction with lumps and itching (me, for one). If that is the case, persuade your artist to tattoo "dry" without the ointment. It is perfectly satisfactory and no harder on the tattooer or tattooee. I personally

cannot see the need for the "grease" layer as an added possibility for foreign body reactions. [Ed. - Note that some artists use plain petroleum jelly, while others use vitamin-enhanced products.]

TATTOOS AND MRI

Magnetic Resonance Imaging utilizes nuclear magnetic resonance to produce detailed images of the interior of the human body. A fairly detailed discussion of the physics of how this works can be found at:

<http://www.cis.rit.edu/htbooks/mri/bmri.htm>

The relevant issue for tattoo enthusiasts is that MRI utilizes a strong magnetic field and radio-frequency radiation which can interact with some tattoo inks containing metal salts. Several people have reported some mild discomfort during MRI. This took the form of heat in the tattooed areas. The treatment for this was to apply cold compresses to the areas to absorb the heat. Apparently, this does not affect the quality of the images recorded by the MRI.

HOW DO I TEMPORARILY COVER UP A TATTOO?

If you are going to a job interview or some other event that requires you to conceal your tattoos (and clothing is not an option), there are two cosmetic products recommended:

1. Joe Blasco's line of theatrical cosmetics
2. Dermablend cover-up make-up, which is used by people who have vitiligo (Michael Jackson's mysterious melanin-loss disease), scars, birthmarks and tattoos.

For Blasco products, check with your local theater supply store (or your local theater - they might be able to supply you, or refer you to their direct number). Dermablend is available at cosmetic counters.

HOW DO I BECOME A TATTOO ARTIST?

Depending on how it's asked, this question probably receives the most amounts of flames when posted to bulletin boards and forums. The general consensus is that there is only "one way" to do it, and that is to apprentice, period. There is far more to be learned about the art and business of tattooing than what can be obtained simply from a book (e.g. customer service, etiquette, running a business, dealing with emergencies).

Ever seen Karate Kid where the boy learns his skills through mundane, seemingly unrelated things like waxing a car? Spending eight months to a year under a well-established artist's wings can help you to really learn what's involved in being a professional tattooist, as well as in how to run your own small business. Just as you would never consider becoming a professional masseuse or an acupuncturist without proper training, neither should you try to become a professional tattooist without the proper training.

Unfortunately, many people consider "proper training" to mean "good at drawing and used a tattoo machine." If you are a good illustrator, it simply means you might have a better chance at finding an artist willing to be your mentor.

The hardest part of becoming an apprentice is in finding an artist who will take you seriously and let you work in the shop. Having a portfolio of illustrations will certainly help. You will also end up knocking on a lot of doors. Not every artist will want to have an apprentice, since that means extra work for them. To prove your commitment, you may be asked to put time in without any monetary compensation at all for a while. And for many months, all you will do might be answering the phone and mopping the floor. But remember that that is all part of your training! Wax in, wax out! Expect to devote at least two to three years to this form of training.

Lastly, think very carefully about your consequences should you decide not to go with the apprentice route:

- You may have difficulty becoming an established artist.
- You may have difficulty finding people you can work on.
- You may end up with a bad reputation for bad work.
- You may not learn how to run a business, and end up having to declare bankruptcy.

...be happy you're not trying to become a master sushi chef: They take 12 YEARS to attain (and it takes five years just to get the privilege of cooking the rice).

THE DARK SIDE OF TATTOOING

While the bulk of this FAQ looks at tattoos and tattooing very positively, I need to address the fact that tattooing can be used in harmful, negative ways. If you have ever been forced to get a tattoo you did not want, or had someone else take your idea or identity, this section will be of particular interest to you.

Particular thanks to Michelle De Lio for assistance in this section.

"RAPE BY TATTOO"

"Rape by tattoo" by its definition means that someone violated you in a personal way by using a tattoo as a weapon. This could be done in two ways. One could be that you were forced to receive a tattoo you did not want. The movie, 'Tattoo', carries this theme to the extreme, with an obsessed tattoo artist kidnapping a professional model (Maude Adams) and tattooing her while she is unconscious. The movie in fact, was boycotted by some women's groups when it was first released.

While genital penetration may not be involved, involuntary tattooing is an unpleasant experience for the recipient, and is very symbolic of the use of a penetrating weapon to mark an indelible stain on the victim's body.

The second could happen when someone chooses to tattoo your name on their body without your full permission and cooperation. Some may think, "What's the problem? You should be flattered," However, those who have had this happen to them have noted a profound sense of loss, that part of their identity or soul was stolen from them. In one particular case, a man surprised his girlfriend with a tattoo of her name on him, and with it began the start of a stalking relationship that terrified her for years in an obsessive/possessive situation involving domestic abuse.

I am hereby urging the strongest recommendation in the entire FAQ: If you want the name of your loved one tattooed on your body or your loved one wants one of your name, 150% open-hearted,

voluntary permission must be given by both parties as a prerequisite. (Exceptions made for names of the deceased, or of famous people). There should be no "convincing" or "talking into" involved. If there is the slightest hesitation, please do not do this. Those who wish to have their loved one represented in a tattoo should instead use a symbolic object.

FULFILLING UNREQUITED FEELINGS WITH TATTOOS

There are some lonely people in this world who enjoy inflicting pain on their bodies (NOT to say all those who enjoy it are lonely!), or have wish fulfillment dreams that they try to make come true with tattoos.

Michelle Delio tells the following story:

"Back when he was first starting out, Shotsie Gorman says a girl came into shop - kind of shy and awkward - wanted a name tattooed around her nipple. Shotsie tried to back off, feeling weird about this, but the shop owner insisted.

"So Shotsie does the tattoo. He's almost finished when he says, 'Well you and ----- must have a really special relationship for you to be getting this kind of tattoo, right?' The girl replies, 'He doesn't even know I exist.' Shotsie said this made him physically ill. That was the start of his personal ban on doing names/slogans, because he says there's too much weirdness connected with it."

GETTING TATTOOED IN A BDSM SCENE OR RELATIONSHIP

There are a couple of concerns with tattooing in the BDSM context. First, there are many sanitation concerns with regard to tattooing, and just as with piercing (either play piercing or "real" piercing) during a scene, it is imperative that all sterilization procedures are correctly followed. And because of the permanency of tattoos, things such as designs, locations, and placement should be fully agreed upon prior to the start of a scene. While this may take some of the spontaneity out of things, it is a very important step that should not be omitted. Recipients of the tattooing in a scene should be fully aware during the procedure, and be able to safe-word out if the scene is not comfortable for them.

Second (and within the frame of the "dark side" theme of this section) there are some tops who extend the relationship with their bottoms beyond scenes, and in some instances, bottoms may feel that they have no choice but to be tattooed (or pierced, branded, etc.) by order of their tops.

While persons may enlarge their relationship boundaries beyond the actual scenes, it is important to make sure that such permanent things as tattoos are still fully agreed upon. Just as safe words exist, a bottom should still be feel comfortable when it comes to a decision to receive a tattoo as part of the relationship. The bottom should always have the final say in such matters, if only for the fact that the relationship may not always last, and because body modification affects people at very deep levels.

"PROPERTY OF ----" TATTOOS

There are (primarily) women who have "Property of ----" tattooed on their buttocks to show that they are "owned" by their partner. This has been traditional with bikers. Some women have "Property of [name of the club]" tattooed on themselves after they pass some sort of initiation (which could be having sex with every member of the club) so they could join the club (although many times, they join the club as a "hood ornament" and not as full-fledged members with the same rank and status of men).

Treating women as property is both degrading and insulting. It is also a sad fact that some women feel that they are not worth as much without this stamp of approval. Do women in these situations have the capacity to know what "true consent" is?

Michelle DeLio tells the tale of one such woman, who broke up with one man and married another: "As a sort of wedding present to her, they dragged the girl to the local tattooist and they inked 'CANCELLED' on her butt in big black block letters, like a meat stamp (over her old 'Property of' tattoo)."

"CULTURE VULTURES"

The popularity of primitive designs has led to people searching anthropology books for cultural images for their tattoos. It is a very bad idea to use sacred images of a culture to which you do not belong. Using clan symbols, shields and other such images merely for visual effect is nothing short of robbing the soul of a culture. On the other hand, tattoos inspired by native iconography are both exciting and respectful. Otherwise, make sure you can lay claim to the image by checking your genealogy.

Also, remember that some cultures have an extensive tattoo history. Beyond the images themselves, some tattoos, like the Maori moko, are considered sacred and limited only to those who are allowed to wear them. For the Maori, a foreigner who wears a moko without understanding its significance, or receiving the proper blessings, is nothing short of cultural robbery.

- The use of icons and symbols is a real sore point for people of a culture that considers the symbols sacred. Examples: Family crests, patterns indicating genealogical lineage, and religious symbols.
- Many cultural images are not sacred or religious. These should be available for use by those from other cultures.
- Many symbols of one culture are actually adaptations from other cultures. From this standpoint, some people feel that the use of cultural symbols should be okay.

Perhaps a compromise or middle ground is best in this situation. If you are interested in a tattoo from another culture, it is suggested you:

- First check to see if the image is sacred and whether "foreigners" are allowed to wear the image. After all, if you desire to wear the image because you respect it or the culture, the last thing you want to do is offend the very people you look up to.
- If the wearing of the image requires some sort of blessing from a person from that culture, do some research as to how this could be done?
- Even if the image is not sacred, you should check with a person native to that culture to make sure the image looks correct. An example is Japanese kanji characters.
- Above all, be respectful. Do a little research. If you find an image you like, try to learn a little bit about the culture and the image. Make sure you are not offending anyone with the tattoo idea you have.

U.S. LAWS REGULATING TATTOOING

Where available, I have included the information about the laws regarding tattooing for that state. Note that some states leave this up to the cities or municipalities. This information should only be used for

unofficial information purposes, and may change by each legislative session - for accurate and up-to-date information regarding the laws of your area, contact a professional tattoo shop or the department of public health.

The laws regarding tattooing differ as greatly as there are states in the U.S. While a handful serves as model states for regulations, most are completely unregulated, with the exception of some laws on the minimum allowable age. There is no federal legislation regarding tattooing.

To complicate things however, many states leave these regulations up to the cities, counties and municipalities. In addition, changes or amendments to existing laws crop up regularly.

Regulations help promote professionalism, and discourage "scratchers." This is important when considering disease transmission (HIV and Hepatitis-B in particular). If you think this is a frivolous issue, consider that South Carolina has banned tattooing altogether.

If state legislators try to introduce regulations on tattooing make sure they follow in the lines of the 11 states, which cover points such as:

Artist requirements: Training, knowledge of sanitation, washing of hands and use of barrier gloves for every new client

Facility requirements: Clean work area, availability of running water

Equipment requirements: Autoclave, disposable needles, covered waste containers

Procedural requirements: Customers needing to be sober, use of signed consent forms

Basic sanitary requirements:

Facilities

- Building must be clean, in good repair, have adequate lighting
- Adequate ventilation required
- Tattoo establishments may not be used for any non-tattoo related activities
- Toilets must be provided for customers
- Work area must be separate from the rest of the business, or at least separated upon request

Artist Hygiene

- Artists should always wash their hands before every tattoo.
- Separate sink (away from the toilet facilities) must be available for artists to wash their hands
- Artists must dry their hands with single use paper towels or some sort of mechanical (air) dryer
- Artists with communicable diseases may not tattoo
- Food, drink, and smoking not allowed in the work area
- Smoking prohibited

- May not tattoo in exchange for sex

Equipment

- Immersion in a germicidal solution as an alternative to autoclaving allowed
- Use of defective, dull, or rusty equipment is banned
- Disposable single-use ink containers must be used, and with any unused ink must be discarded after every customer
- All dyes must be approved
- Minimum number of needles and tubes must be kept on hand
- Only sterilized or disposable razors allowed
- Covered waste containers required
- Special storage cabinets for tattooing materials required
- Tattooing materials may not be stored in the restroom.

Procedures

- Facial tattoos may only be done by licensed physicians
- Injection of chemicals into the skin by tattoo artists to remove tattoos is illegal
- Customers must be sober
- Signed consent forms required
- Parental consent forms required for minors
- Artists must keep records on every customer for at least 2 years
- Oral care instructions required

[Click here to view the tattoo designs](#)