Tattoos, Body Piercings, and Health

By Leanne Currie-McGhee
# Contents

**Introduction**
- Pain and Relief ........................................... 6

**Chapter One**
- Tattooing and Body Piercing Today .......................... 10

**Chapter Two**
- Tattoo Health Risks ......................................... 21

**Chapter Three**
- Body Piercing Health Risks ................................... 32

**Chapter Four**
- Body Art for Health and Well-Being ....................... 44

**Chapter Five**
- Removal Challenges ......................................... 56

**Source Notes** .................................................. 68

**For Further Research** ........................................ 72

**Index** ........................................................... 74

**Picture Credits** ................................................ 79

**About the Author** ............................................. 80
Body Art Benefits
On the other end of the spectrum, tattoos and piercings have been known to help people deal with certain medical issues. For example, tattoos and piercings can be used to cover up scars or transform a flawed body part into something more aesthetically pleasing to the person. This can then improve how people feel about themselves and their outlook on life.

A young woman who already has tattoos and piercings adds a tongue piercing to her body art. Many people who get piercings and tattoos have no problems other than temporary discomfort but some people experience serious health issues.
Chapter One

Tattooing and Body Piercing Today

If you walk down the street and glance at passersby, chances are you will see not just one, but several people who are decorated with tattoos, body piercings, or both. Decorating one’s body with permanent body art has become a popular trend in today’s world. Tattoos and body piercings cross all segments of society. Teenagers and adults, men and women, and people of all races are inking and piercing their bodies. Many of those who embrace this trend will find joy in their new look, but others will experience unwanted side effects or even remorse.

How Popular Is Body Art?
Tattoos were once primarily worn by those in the military, bikers, and gang members, but today people of all walks of life decorate themselves with tattoos. According to a 2012 Harris Poll examining the popularity of permanent body art, 21 percent of adults have at least one tattoo. This represents an increase in the number of people adorning themselves with tattoos, based on poll results from 2008, which found that 14 percent of people had tattoos. “It’s not all about drunk teens and bikers anymore,” said Jonathan Lalut, manager of Element Tattoo in Phoenix. “We had a family come in here a week ago: mom, dad and teenagers. They all got tattooed. The tattoo industry has evolved.”

As with tattoos, body piercings other than on the earlobes were once uncommon. But today a pierced nose, navel, tongue, or other body part hardly stands out as unusual. At Northwestern University in Chicago a study of the prevalence of tattoos and body piercings and related health
Actress Pamela Anderson discovered she contracted hepatitis C in 2002 and believes a tattoo was the cause. Hepatitis C is a disease that leads to swelling of the liver. This can lead to cirrhosis, or severe scarring, of the liver, which can eventually result in liver failure. There are medications available to help combat the virus and keep the liver healthy. Anderson has stated that she and her then husband, Tommy Lee of Motley Crüe, shared a tattoo needle. Since then she has suffered from the disease and will likely have to deal with it the rest of her life, because 75 to 85 percent of hepatitis C cases becomes a chronic affliction. When she was first diagnosed, Anderson feared she would die in ten to fifteen years, but since then she has been able to maintain her liver’s health through the latest treatments. However, the treatments themselves are difficult to endure. In 2009 Anderson decided to get antiviral injections to help keep her liver healthy even though the injections would cause pain. “There’s lots of side effects,” she told CNN’s Larry King before starting the treatments. “It’s going to be a year of basically having the flu. Your hair falls out. It’s a little kind of chemotherapy.”
Body Art Allergies

Another potential problem with getting a tattoo or piercing is developing an allergic reaction to the body art. A person’s skin may develop a rash or itch due to the inks used in the tattoo. Some people may experience hives or red sores because of the type of jewelry used in a piercing.

A tattoo allergy is caused by the body’s reaction to an ingredient in the tattoo ink. Tattoo inks can be made with a combination of different ingredients and chemicals. Some of the ingredients that are more prone to cause allergic reactions are iron oxide, mercury sulfide, ferric hydrate, aluminum, and manganese. Studies have found that red tattoo ink is the most likely color to produce an allergy. Typically, a tattoo allergy results in swelling, irritation, a rash, or other skin abnormality around the site of the tattoo.

In many cases ointment—and time—can take care of a tattoo allergy. However, in more serious cases an infection may result from the allergy and require antibiotics. In the worst cases tattoo removal is the only way to eliminate the allergic reaction.

Piercings can also result in allergic reactions if the person is allergic to the material in the jewelry that is used. One of the most common...
Books


Internet Sources


Note: Boldface page numbers indicate illustrations.

allergic reactions, 16–17
  from piercings, 13, 32, 41
  from tattoo inks, 12, 14
alopecia. See hair loss
American Dental Association, 33, 35
American Red Cross, 22, 30
Anderson, Pamela, 15
Angel, Elayne, 18, 36, 38, 54
Archives of Dermatology (journal), 57–58
Association of Professional Piercers, 40, 42, 43
Barney, Tamra, 60
bleeding
  after tattooings, 27, 30
  from tongue piercings, 34–35
blood-borne diseases, 14–15, 21–23
  See also hepatitis C
blood donations, 22
blood poisoning. See septicemia
blowouts, 39
body art
  future of, 20
  impact of, on careers, 57, 59
  medical uses of, 8–9, 18–19
  popularity of, 10
  See also piercing(s); tattoos/tattooing
body piercers
  licensing requirements in Oklahoma, 41
  regulation of, 42–43
British Health Protection Agency, 32, 33, 35
Bryant, Michelle, 19
Carias, Ann, 45
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 14, 21–22, 25
contact dermatitis, 17
cryosurgery, 62
dermabrasion, 61–62
dermal punches, 66
Dermatology (journal), 27