What is body art?

Tattoos and body piercing are the most popular forms of body art in Australia. Tattoos are permanent designs made under the skin with a machine. They are made with coloured inks put under the skin with a sharp instrument. Body piercings are holes in the skin made so jewellery can be worn. The holes are made with a sharp instrument. Whenever you consider any kind of body art you need to remember there is always a risk of infection.

What you need to know

Body art is a very personal thing, and there are different body artists who work with different ages and backgrounds are getting tattoos and having different body parts pierced. This guide will help you find the right body artist.

Body art is a very personal thing, and there are many reasons people choose it. It is important to be clear about your reasons for getting body art and to know how to get work that looks good, and doesn’t harm your body and health.

If you are considering multiple piercings or tattoos, start with a small one to see how you manage the procedure and its care.

Where to go

Do not consider letting friends or people who work outside of established premises do your body art.

Preventing yourself for body art

Do not rush into getting your body art done. A tattoo should be considered PERMANENT. Although tattoos can be removed, it is expensive and your skin will look the same as it THINK BEFORE YOU INK.

Body artists suggest you consider these points before getting anything done.

Be as healthy as possible. If you’re sick it will slow down the healing and you’ll have more risk of getting a local infection.

Do not have alcohol for 24 hours before a procedure; alcohol in your bloodstream can irritate a new piercing and cause complications. Breathing exercises can help you relax during the procedure.

Some procedures can be painful, but it passes quickly if there are no complications. Breathing exercises can help you relax during the procedure. Some people feel faint following the procedure (not returning them to stock).

Certain medications (including over-the-counter ones) can also increase bleeding and/or slow down healing. You should discuss this with your doctor.

If you are considering multiple piercings or tattoos, start with a small one to see how you manage the procedure and its care.

If you know you have multiple allergies and want a tattoo, see if you can apply a patch test with the dye, before you have the full procedure.

Body artists need to know

What your body artist needs to know

The body artist wants you to be comfortable and take care of their own interests and health, so there are a few things they will ask you to do, such as:

Shop around, ask friends who have had good art work done, who they recommend.

Find a studio where you feel comfortable, and where staff answer all your questions.

Select a studio that has: 'Aftercare Service' – so you can have follow-up visits to check the work and get help for any problems.

When choosing a body artist don’t go by the art on the web, look at examples of the body artist’s personal work – if they can’t show you, find another studio.

Most studios have body artists who are members of the professional associations for their industry. These require that members meet professional standards of infection control and artwork and that you should discuss any points raised in this pamphlet with all body artists, whether they belong to professional associations or not.

Some states and territories provide infection control guidelines for tattoo and piercing artists. Studios need to be approved by local government but this is more standards for premises than for body art technique and infection control standards.

Arriving for your procedure

What your body artist needs to know

The body artist wants you to be comfortable and take care of their own interests and health, so there are a few things they will ask you to do, such as:

Sign a statement saying you are over 18, if you don’t have proof of your age. Give your medical history, particularly any infectious skin diseases or communicable diseases you may have.

Tell them all you have or any problems with skin healing, especially if keloid scarring occurs (keloids are raised scars, more common in people of darker skin).

Talk about the style of body art and where you want it placed. Remember that body art that is very noticeable may hurt your chances of getting some jobs. Tell the body artist whether you have had alcohol or drugs that day. Most body artists will not work on people who are under the influence.

Your health and safety

Make sure that the body artist:

Knows the Code of Practice for Skin Penetration Procedures and can talk about it with you.

Has a clean and tidy, well-studio. (The body artists should be clean and tidy too)

Puts cleaning solutions, creams and anything else that is put on the skin into single-use disposable containers.

Cleans and disinfects your skin thoroughly before the procedure.

Cleans the work areas between clients.
Notes on ear piercing guns and ear piercing

Stud guns are designed for ear lobes only. Do not allow anyone to pierce any other part of your body with a stud gun. If you are getting your ears pierced with a stud gun, make sure it is a sterile, single-use, cartridge model.

Make sure the body artist meets the same requirements as for any other body piercing.

Cosmetic tattooing (also called permanent makeup)

Cosmetic tattooing is most commonly performed in beauty salons for eye and lip lining and may be advertised as permanent makeup rather than as tattooing. If you are thinking of having one of these procedures, consider the following information.

Remember, cosmetic styles change and although the work will last for a very long time, it is a permanent procedure.

Make sure that the body artist has permission of the local government authority to operate from their premises. This means the premises meet minimum health and safety standards. Ask to see the body artist’s training certificates and photographic examples of their work— if they can’t show them to you, find another body artist.

Ensure that a new sterile needle is attached to the tattooing machine in your presence; DO NOT agree to a procedure if the needle is already in place.

Ensure that the body artist meets with the requirements set down in the health and safety section of this pamphlet.

Taking care of a new piercing – the dos and don’ts of care

DO NOT Touch your new piercing unless you have washed your hands well first, that goes for other people touching the piercing too.

DO NOT USE alcohol-based cleaning solutions. They will slow healing and may cause skin irritation.

DO NOT SHARE jewellery with friends, even in healed piercings.

DO NOT INSERT nonsterile jewellery or jewellery made of metals other than those recommended by the operator.

DO NOT ALLOW the body fluids of others to come into contact with your piercing until the site is completely healed.

DO LISTEN to the care advice you are given by the body artist, and follow it.

DO RETURN to the body artist when advised, or if having problems.

DO AVOID swimming until the piercing is healed. Contaminated water is likely to pose a risk of infection.

DO AVOID having sex for at least a week after a genital piercing, check with your body artist as some genital piercings take longer to heal.

DO SEE A DOCTOR at the first signs of infection, do not wait until pus forms or jewellery cannot be removed.

About blood-borne infections

Hepatitis C

This virus is carried in the blood and can result in long-term illness affecting the liver. The equipment used in tattooing and body piercing can pose a major risk of transmission of hepatitis C if contaminated with infected blood. There is no preventative vaccine.

Hepatitis B

This virus can result in long-term illness affecting the liver and is transmitted by blood-to-blood contact and by sexual activity. A safe, effective vaccine is available.

HIV/AIDS

HIV is the virus that leads to AIDS. HIV is transmitted through blood-to-blood contact and sexual activity. The equipment used in tattooing and body piercing, if contaminated with infected blood, can pose a risk of transmission of the virus to you. People are infected for life. As yet there is no vaccine or cure.

Bacterial Infections

There are numerous infections that can be spread through poor hygiene practices, such as poor body artist standards or by you not following the aftercare instructions given. At worst they can be life threatening, at least the work you have had done will be damaged.

Table: Healing times

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Body Part</th>
<th>Healing Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EAR LOBES</td>
<td>4–6 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAR CARTILAGE</td>
<td>6–8 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TONGUE</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAVEL</td>
<td>4–6 weeks</td>
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<tr>
<td>GENITAL</td>
<td>4–6 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PENIS</td>
<td>3–6 months</td>
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</tbody>
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For further information please contact your state or territory health department (ask for environmental health or communicable diseases) or hepatitis C council.

Acknowledgments

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www.health.gov.au

All information in this publication is correct as of June 2011.