

TATTOO AFTERCARE

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A fresh tattoo is a wound. How you care for it during the healing period directly determines how much ink survives, how evenly the tattoo settles, and whether complications develop. Follow these instructions carefully. When in doubt, contact your tattoo artist.

1. The first hours

Your artist will cover the tattoo before you leave the studio. The type of covering determines what happens next.

If you received cling film (plastic wrap): Remove it within 2–4 hours, or as your artist instructed. Cling film is a temporary barrier for the journey home. Leaving it on overnight traps heat, moisture, and bacteria against the wound.

If you received adhesive film (Dermalize, Saniderm, or similar): Leave it on for 3–5 days unless your artist specified otherwise. The dark, fluid-filled layer beneath the film is normal — it is plasma, blood, and excess ink. The film creates a sealed healing environment. Do not remove it early unless it leaks, loses adhesion, or you develop a rash or itching at the film's edges (which may indicate an adhesive allergy — remove immediately and switch to traditional aftercare).

If you received an absorbent bandage: Remove it after the time your artist specified, typically a few hours.

2. Washing

Once the initial covering is removed (or once the film dressing comes off after 3–5 days):

1. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.
2. Wash the tattoo gently with lukewarm water and a mild, unscented soap.
3. Use clean hands only — no cloths, sponges, or towels against the tattoo.
4. Pat dry with a clean paper towel or let it air-dry.
5. Do not rub, scrub, or use hot water.

Repeat this wash 2–3 times per day for the first two weeks.

3. Moisturising

After each wash, once the skin is dry, apply a thin layer of unscented moisturiser. The keyword is thin — a light film that absorbs within minutes. If the surface still looks glossy or wet after a few minutes, you applied too much.

Use: Unscented, hypoallergenic lotions or creams. Specialised tattoo aftercare balms are recommended by your artist.

Do not use: Petroleum jelly (Vaseline) — too occlusive, traps bacteria. Scented lotions — fragrances irritate healing skin. Rubbing alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, witch hazel — too harsh, damages ink. Antibiotic ointments (Neosporin, Polysporin) — can draw out ink and cause reactions.

Continue moisturising 2–3 times per day for approximately two weeks, reducing as the skin's surface integrity is restored.

4. What to avoid during healing

- **Do not pick, scratch, or peel.** The tattoo will scab and flake. This is normal. Picking removes ink and causes patchiness. If itching is intense, gently pat the area with a clean hand or apply a thin layer of moisturiser.
- **Do not submerge in water.** No baths, swimming pools, hot tubs, oceans, lakes, or rivers until fully healed (at least 2–3 weeks). Brief, lukewarm showers are fine.
- **Avoid direct sun exposure.** UV radiation damages ink, especially during healing when the epidermis is thin. Cover the tattoo with clothing. Do not apply sunscreen to a healing tattoo — wait until fully healed.

- **Avoid heavy exercise for 1–2 weeks.** Sweat irritates the wound. Gym equipment carries bacteria. Stretching can crack forming scabs. Tight athletic clothing rubs. Light activity (walking) is fine.
- **Do not re-wrap in cling film.** Once the initial covering is removed, the tattoo should remain uncovered (unless using a film dressing system as directed by your artist).
- **Avoid tight clothing over the tattoo.** Fabric rubbing against healing skin can pull scabs and delay healing.
- **Do not touch the tattoo with unwashed hands.** Every contact risks transferring bacteria to the wound.
- **Sleep on clean sheets.** Change your bedding before the first night after your session. Avoid sleeping directly on the tattoo if possible.

5. What to expect during healing

Days 1–3: Redness, swelling, warmth, tenderness. The tattoo may weep clear plasma and excess ink. This is the normal inflammatory response.

Days 3–7: Weeping stops. A thin layer of dried plasma forms over the surface. The area may feel tight and itchy. Do not scratch.

Days 7–14: The thin scab flakes and peels like a light sunburn. Some ink comes away with the flakes (this is ink from the epidermis, not the dermis). The tattoo may look faded, dull, or hazy. This is temporary.

Weeks 2–4: The surface is intact. The tattoo may look slightly milky or cloudy as the new epidermis matures. Colour and sharpness return gradually.

Weeks 4–8: Full healing. The tattoo reaches its settled appearance. Your artist may schedule a touch-up at this point if needed.

6. When to seek medical attention

Some redness and swelling in the first few days are normal. Contact a medical professional if you experience:

- Redness that spreads significantly beyond the tattoo and increases over several days
- Increasing pain (rather than gradually decreasing)
- Pus — thick, coloured, or foul-smelling discharge (distinct from clear plasma)
- Fever or chills
- Red streaks extending outward from the tattoo
- Warm, hard swelling that does not subside

Early treatment prevents complications. Do not wait to see if symptoms resolve on their own.

7. Long-term care

- **Sun protection.** Apply SPF 30+ broad-spectrum sunscreen over healed tattoos whenever they are exposed to sunlight. UV is the single largest factor in tattoo fading over time.
- **Moisturise regularly.** Healthy, hydrated skin keeps the tattoo clear and vibrant. Dry or neglected skin obscures the ink beneath it.
- **General skin health.** Hydration, nutrition, and avoiding excessive sun damage all contribute to how a tattoo looks over the years.

Tattoo artist:

Contact: