

FACT SHEET

TOOL KIT FOR TEEN CARE, SECOND EDITION

BODY ART

What is Body Art?

- · Body art includes piercing, tattooing, and branding.
- Body art for decoration or rituals goes back thousands of years.
- In recent years, media stars and professional athletes have made tattooing and piercing popular as a form of decoration, a fashion statement, and a means of self-expression.
- More and more young individuals today are choosing to have body art.
- Much of body art is permanent, and decisions about it need to be made carefully.

What is piercing, and what are the most common sites?

- Piercing is a hole made in your body by a needle.
- · A piece of jewelry is inserted into the hole.
- The most common sites for piercing are the ear, belly button, and nostril.
- Other sites include the lip, tongue, eyebrow, nipples, and genitals.

What are the most common problems from body piercing, and what are some ways to prevent some problems?

- Infections, scars called keloids (growth of scar tissue in an area of a wound), and metal allergies can occur. For tongue piercing, significant swelling is a problem for the first few days. Over time, tongue jewelry can damage the front teeth and gums.
- To prevent injury, athletes often are asked to take out visible piercings, especially earrings and tongue studs, before playing sports.
- Before you get pierced, find out if you are allergic to any metals.
- Safe metals for body piercing include: surgical steel, solid 14-karat or 18-karat gold, niobium, titanium, and platinum.
- You also should be careful if you have any medical problems that would make you likely to bleed a lot or not heal well.

- Ear piercing guns, which have been commonly used, particularly in retail stores, drive a solid stud through the skin or tissue. The following list highlights concerns about using this method:
 - Ear piercing guns should never be used on any body part except the ear lobe, and the studs are even too short for some ear lobes.
 - It can cause significant tissue damage by crushing tissue and causing both the earring and back to become set in.
 - Many guns are made of plastic and cannot be placed in an autoclave (machine used to sterilize equipment) between clients.
 - Other instruments that are similar to surgical instruments can be autoclaved between each client.
 - The Association of Professional Piercers strongly recommends against the use of reusable piercing guns.
- The healing time for body piercing varies by site. For instance, the ear lobe may heal in 6–8 weeks, but ear cartilage (upper part of the ear) may take between 4 months and 1 year to heal.

What should you expect if you have a piercing?

- The area you have chosen to be pierced is cleaned with a soap that kills disease-causing bacteria.
- The following items should be done by the individual performing the piercing:
 - Follow the Occupational Safety and Health Administrations Universal Precautions (regulations that tell what should be done when dealing with body fluids)
 - Wear clean gloves and puncture your skin with a very sharp, clean, single-use needle and use sterilized autoclaved piercing instruments
 - Throw away the needle in a special container so that there is no risk of the needle or blood touching someone else
 - Check and adjust the jewelry
 - Give you instructions on how to make sure your new piercing heals correctly and what to do if there is a problem
- The web site of the Association of Professional Piercers (www.safepiercing.org) has brochures with instructions for aftercare of piercings by body site.







- Some individual states and local governments have certain rules regarding piercing and, in some cases, require minors to get their parent's permission.
- A good piercer will have had training on various piercing techniques.

What you should know before you get a tattoo?

- A tattoo is made by taking a needle and injecting ink into the deeper layer of skin (the dermis), so the tattoo is permanent.
- Originally, this was done by hand, but now tattoo machines are used. A sterile needle is dipped in ink to apply the color. The machine moves the needle in and out, driving the ink about 1/8 inch into the skin
- If you are thinking about getting a tattoo, it is important to get it done safely.
- If you have a medical condition, such as heart disease or diabetes mellitus, ask your doctor if you should follow any precautions before getting a tattoo.
- If you are likely to get keloids, it is probably best to avoid getting a tattoo.

The following list provides information you should think about before getting a tattoo:

- Tattoos are permanent.
- Before getting a tattoo, you should ask yourself, "How will I feel about this tattoo five years from now?"
- Think about the location of where you want to get a tattoo.
- It is important to find an artist whose work you like and who will work on you safely.
- Although there have been no actual cases of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) (a virus that can spread through contact with bodily fluids such as blood and causes acquired immune deficiency syndrome [AIDS]) transmitted from tattooing in the United States, a scratch with an

- infected needle can transmit HIV. It can definitely transmit hepatitis (a virus that can damage the liver).
- Make sure the tattoo studio has an autoclave to sterilize the equipment.
- Check that the tattoo artist has a license for tattooing. Do not let a friend give you a tattoo.
- Be sure the tattoo studio follows the Occupational Safety and Health Administrations Universal Precautions (regulations that tell what should be done when dealing with body fluids).
- Make sure your artist washes his or her hands and puts on a new set of gloves before setting up the tubes, needles, and ink supplies.
- Always insist that you see your tattoo artist remove a new needle and tube set-up from a sealed envelope before you get your tattoo. Be certain you see your tattooist pour a new ink supply into a new disposable container. If the artist or studio does not follow these standard safety guidelines, if the studio looks unclean or if you feel uncomfortable, find a better place to get your tattoo.
- Individual state and local governments have certain rules for the tattoo industry. Some of these rules do not allow minors to get tattoos.

Can you remove a tattoo?

- A lot of individuals love their tattoos and keep them forever. However, some individuals want to remove their tattoo.
- Removing a tattoo used to require surgery (cutting out the tattoo and sewing the edges of skin together), or dermabrasion (sanding the skin down), both of which result in a scar.
- A new method involves laser removal. Removing a tattoo by laser can be uncomfortable and feel a lot like getting a tattoo. The process may take several months and can be much more expensive than the actual tattoo. In some cases, depending on the ink thickness, depth, and color, it may not be possible to completely remove the tattoo.

What is branding?

- Branding (or scarification) is less common than tattooing and involves using hot metal or lasers to scar the skin. This is becoming more common in the United States. The scarring results may work better on darker pigmented skin than tattoos, and the three-dimensional aspect is pleasing to some.
- There are no professional organizations for scarification, and the procedures cannot guarantee a certain result.

For More Information

We have provided information on the following organizations and web sites because they have information that may be of interest to our readers. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) does not necessarily endorse the views expressed or the facts presented by these organizations or on these web sites. Further, ACOG does not endorse any commercial products that may be advertised or available from these organizations or on these web sites.

American Acadmeny of Dermatology

Telephone: (847) 240-1289 or (866) 503-SKIN (7546)

Web: www.aad.org

American Academy of Pediatrics

Telephone: (847) 434-4000 Web: www.aap.org

Association of Professional Piercers

Telephone: (888) 888-1APP (1277) or (785) 841-6060

Web: www.safepiercing.org

Teens Health

Nemours Foundation

Telephone: (904) 232-4100

 $Web: Piercing: www.kidshealth.org/teen/your_body/$

body_art/body_piercing_safe.html

Tattoos: www.kidshealth.org/teen/your_body/body_ art/safe_tattooing.html