

What to know about **Infections**

Infections are an inherent risk of any body modification. If you notice any of the following symptoms you can contact your artist for guidance. But don't forget your artist is not a medical professional and their advice is based solely on their personal experiences and research.



If you're worried about an infection, the best strategy to follow is to talk to your artist AS WELL as a doctor who can actually prescribe you any medications you might need.

How To Identify An Infected Tattoo

- **Continuous/Extreme Pain**

Generally, all new tattoos will cause some amount of pain in the first few days, and the bigger the tattoo, the more painful the area usually is, and the longer the pain normally takes to completely resolve.

However, if your tattoo starts to cause excruciating, searing pain, or if the tattoo is still very painful to touch after 7-10 days (or if the pain is getting worse instead of getting better), then this could be the sign of a possible infection.

- **Hot To The Touch**

Most tattoos will be warm to the touch for a few days or feel like they're burning due to the body's natural healing mechanism to enhance blood flow to heal the tattoo (increased blood flow to the area will naturally increase the temperature of the site).

But, if your ink becomes very hot to the touch, or is still warm/hot to the touch after a week, then this can be the sign of a possible infection.

- **Extreme Itching**

While annoying itching is common with a new tattoo, especially if the area becomes very dry. Getting an itch that never goes away or becomes so extreme that you cannot handle it can be a sign of infection or an allergic reaction. More so if the itching doesn't go away after tempting to soothe the area.

A skin infection is also much more likely if the itching is accompanied by one or more of the other symptoms in this list.

- **Swelling**

Swelling is quite common with new tattoos, especially if the tattoo is situated below the waist (legs/ankles/feet), or on a very tender and thin piece of skin like

the inner bicep. If the swelling is very bad, and continues to spread away from the site of the tattoo and fails to reduce over the course of 7-10 days, then this could be caused by an infection.

- **Rash**

A skin rash can present in many different shapes, sizes, textures and colors. While many rashes will just be red and smooth, some may be bumpy and pimply. While a rash on a tattoo commonly signals minor irritation to the skin, it can also be a sign of infection – especially if it continues to get worse, or grows larger and outwards from the tattooed skin. If a rash appears and disappears quickly, it could be a sign of a possible allergic reaction.

However, if the whole tattoo becomes full of crusty, thick, itchy scabs that also begin to ooze and bleed, then this could be the sign of an infection. Infected tattoos generally look very uneven due to thick crusts and dried blood/plasma.

- **Blistering**

Blisters are not a common side-effect of getting a tattoo, and therefore any blistering on the skin around the tattooed area should be seen as suspicious and potentially the result of an infection. All blisters on tattoos should be investigated.

- **Pimples or Boils that Discharge Pus**

Pimples can be common on a new tattoo and are generally not a problem. However, if you develop pimples that begin to ooze and smell bad or develop into large painful boils, then an infection is likely. Pus can be either clear and runny or thick and gloopy, depending on the type of infection.

You should be aware that for the first couple of days, your new tattoo will likely leak small amounts of blood, ink and plasma; so don't get worried and mistake this for an infection. If this happens to you in the first couple of days, it's likely to be completely normal.

- **Foul Odor**

Foul odor being omitted from a tattoo is normally accompanied by oozing and a pus-containing discharge, and is generally a sign that there's an infection taking place. Get the area of skin looked at by a tattoo artist or doctor.

- **Continuous Bleeding**

Bleeding normally slows down once the tattoo has been completed, and normally stops fully after the first 2-3 nights afterward, due to the clotting and scabbing that forms around the area.

An infected tattoo can begin to bleed again after this timeframe; especially if the area has heavily scabbed over and begins to crack and ooze.

- **Red Streaking**

If long lines of redness appear that look as if they're streaking away from your tattoo then you should seek medical attention immediately, as this is a symptom of septicemia – also known as blood poisoning, which is not the same as tattoo ink poisoning.

- **Swollen Lymph Nodes**

There are small lumpy nodules located all around your body called lymph nodes. These help to filter out impurities from your blood.

If there is an infection present, the lymph nodes that are situated closest to the infection generally begin to swell, and they're commonly found in the groin area, armpits, and neck.

If you have a new tattoo that's displaying one or more symptoms in this list, and you also have a swollen lymph node nearby, then an infection may be present and you should notify your doctor.

- **High Temperature / Fever / Extreme Tiredness**

Generally, all infections have the ability to raise the core body temperature and cause lethargy/extreme tiredness.

If you have a high temperature/fever/extreme tiredness in addition to one or more symptoms in this list then you may have an infected tattoo and should visit a doctor.

If your symptoms also include a fast heart rate, increased breathing, and/or general confusion then seek medical attention immediately, as these could be signs of a serious condition, such as sepsis.

Remember

Some of these symptoms can also be mistaken for normal tattoo healing as they can be very similar, and vice-versa.

The best way to differentiate is to rate the severity of the symptom. Symptoms of infection tend to be much worse than common side-effects of healing. While symptoms caused by general healing will slowly go away, symptoms of infection will normally remain the same or continue to get worse.

If your tattoo gets infected

The first thing to note is that all suspected skin infections should be treated seriously. As soon as you suspect your tattoo is infected, **YOU SHOULD GET IN TOUCH WITH YOUR TATTOO ARTIST OR A DOCTOR** so they can arrange to look at the tattoo and advise further. Doctors will also be able to differentiate infection from other issues, such as an allergic reaction.

Antibiotics and steroidal administration are common treatments, and less common methods include infection drainage, and in extreme circumstances, emergency admission to the hospital.

Remember; even if the infection is only minimal and localized to a small area of your tattoo, it may still seriously affect the long-term appearance of your ink if not treated quickly.

If left for too long, an infection can eventually spread to wider areas around the tattoo and begin to cause further damage.