

# Rethink the Ink: Dermatologists Contend With Tattoo Regret

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MIAMI BEACH, Florida — More than one third of people with tattoos will eventually regret them, a survey of 580 dermatology patients in the United Kingdom reveals.

"Regret is more likely if an individual is very young when they have them applied or if they have them done by an amateur tattooist," Caroline Owen, MBBCh, from the Royal Blackburn Hospital in the United Kingdom, told *Medscape Medical News*.

"Dermatologists are well placed to make this an important health education message, particularly in view of the known psychological morbidity that unwanted tattoos can cause," Dr. Owen explained.

"If an individual is determined to have a tattoo, then advise them to ensure that the tattoo parlor is registered and up to date with health and safety legislation and regulations," she noted.

A discreet tattoo might be more cherished, according to responses gathered over 6 months at the Royal Blackburn Hospital, a large general hospital in England.

"Suggest that they pick the site carefully," Dr. Owen said. "We found that tattoos in more visible locations were more likely to be regretted."

The researchers, led by Arif Aslam, MBBCh, administered an anonymous questionnaire to dermatology patients 16 years and older with a tattoo observed during a general skin examination. Of 615 surveys, 580 had evaluable data.

Approximately 45% of respondents got their first tattoo when they were 25 to 40 years of age. Almost half had multiple tattoos (up to 5). Most tattoos were done by a professional tattoo artist.

Overall, men are more likely to report regret about their tattoo than women. Men who got a tattoo before they were 16 years of age were 3 times more likely to regret it than men who waited until they were older.

## Age a Factor

The time since the first tattoo is longer in people who report regret than in people still happy with their tattoo (18 vs 12 years). Women who got a tattoo when they were older than 21 were least likely to report regret.

Less than half of respondents in the regret group would opt to have their tattoo removed.

Albert Nemeth, MD, a private-practice dermatologist with expertise in laser tattoo removal in Clearwater, Florida, who was asked by *Medscape Medical News* to comment on this study, said the association between regret and the age at which the tattoo was acquired "is striking."

"Up to a third regret when a tattoo is acquired before the age of 16, [whereas there is] little regret when acquired after the age of 21," Dr. Nemeth noted. "This is noteworthy because of the efforts of various dermatologic societies in the United States to excite legislatures in their respective states to pass legislation prohibiting minors as young as 14 years from being able to acquire a tattoo. These efforts have been met with a disappointing response," he said.

Dr. Nemeth noted these findings address important issues in the wake of the growing popularity of tattoos.

This study adds to the body of evidence on tattoos, Dr. Nemeth explained, pointing to a previous study (*J Am Acad Dermatol.* 2006;55:413-421) and an [Harris Interactive poll](#) conducted in January 2008.

*The researchers and Dr. Nemeth have disclosed no relevant financial relationships.*

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