

How exactly you should go about getting your tattoo removed



You know that time you went out on a bender when your friend got into law school, and you woke up with a yin-yang tattoo on your butt? Well, thanks to modern medicine, you don't have to live with those drunken mistakes anymore.

Tattoo removal is a growing trend, especially in the past few years, likely due to the fact that laser technology has improved significantly. In fact, according to the marketing company IBISWorld, the [tattoo-removal industry](#) is now worth \$75.5 million, up 500 percent from a decade earlier. Apparently, like many other trends, what was once cool 10 years ago is so early '00s today.

The unfortunate truth is, even if you're not drunk when you get a tattoo, there are many X factors that can make you second-guess your decision after the fact. You could have gone to a less than polished artist, and thus their work was less than stellar. Or you could have come in with what you thought was an awesome tattoo idea that ended up looking way less awesome in reality. Regardless of the reason, you have options if your body art is no longer doing it for you.

What not to try

First things first — this is one of those things where doing it yourself not only doesn't work, it could result in serious injury. Two painful and dangerous home treatments that people used to attempt years ago when laser treatments weren't as developed are dermabrasion and salabrasion.

[Dermabrasion](#) was literally just rubbing and scraping at your skin with anything abrasive, such as sandpaper, to remove the layers of skin that hold the tattoo.

[Salabrasion](#) is essentially the same thing, except you use a heated salt solution to scrape away the skin. Sounds pleasant, right? Either of these methods may succeed in removing the tattoo, but a pretty nasty scar will be left in its place.

Two other tattoo-removal methods also sure to leave scars are [scarification](#) and cryosurgery. Both treatments use methods to burn away a tattoo, only the first uses a burning chemical like acid, and the other employs a freezing chemical.

Laser is the way

Most dermatologists recommend laser tattoo removal as the definitive way to get rid of your unwanted tattoo with minimal pain and scarring. Dr. Paul Frank, founder and director of 5th Avenue Dermatology Surgery and Laser Center in New York City told us exactly how it works. "A high intensity light beam is targeted at the pigmentation, causing it to break apart, become absorbed into the body, and be excreted through the body's natural immune system. The laser treatment causes the pigment to fade substantially over time, but is greatly depending on the age and color of the tattoo."

The procedure is gradual and can take anywhere from four to 12 treatments, depending on the size and detail level of the tattoo, to effectively remove most or all of it. It's also not cheap, with each session costing upwards of \$350. There's usually little to no scarring, although Frank says a slight discoloration of the skin where the tattoo was is possible.

As far as how it feels, doctors tend to say it's uncomfortable but not painful. Patients, on the other hand, say it can feel [worse than getting the tattoo](#); however, icing and OTC pain relievers will apparently do the trick after a particularly painful session.

Cover it up

If you're not in a position to spring for the pricey but most effective laser tattoo-removal treatments, there are simple makeup cover-ups available. [Tattoo Camo](#) and [Tattoo Cosmetics](#) sell kits that work pretty well at masking smaller tattoos. This is great if you have a special occasion like a wedding coming up, for which you'd rather your body art not be the focal point.

It's good to know there's an effective solution if your decision to get permanent body art turns out to be a mistake. However, it's also important to remember how expensive, time-consuming and painful the removal process can be when you're first sitting down in that tattoo artist's chair.