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FIRST-TIMER'S GUIDE

Lip Blushing

A new needle-based treatment gives your lips a semipermanent boost.
By Kate Foster

WHAT IT IS

Like an indelible tint, lip blushing leaves you with a semipermanent, custom shade, such as a subtle pink, red, or coral. It can make your mouth look fuller and younger, or disguise asymmetry and uneven color. The technician uses a smooth, quiet digital tattoo machine and organic pigments—a far cry from the permanent makeup of decades past, which required a harsh traditional tattoo gun to embed long-lasting synthetic pigments. Blushing can be applied in fine lines or in wider brushstroke-like sweeps for shading, lining, and pixilating (creating undetectable dots) with one or a combination of the machine's 15 needles. Results can last up to two years.

COST

At PFrankMD Skin Salon, where aesthetician Christopher Drummond—who is specifically trained in semipermanent makeup tattoos—blushed me, the procedure costs between \$1,200 and \$1,500. A second touch-up visit (if needed) costs \$350.

WHAT I EXPECTED

I've had my brows microbladed (painful), and my tattoo count is in the double digits (even more painful), so I was prepared for discomfort. I also feared walking out with '90s-style lined lips or a bright red clown mouth that wouldn't wash off. Still, I wear lip color every day, so I was excited to see if I'd need to apply it less often.

WHAT IT'S ACTUALLY LIKE

Drummond is a makeup artist as well as an aesthetician working out of a dermatology practice, so the vibe is makeup counter-meets-annual skin check. I'm relieved to hear that my lips will be numbed with topical anesthesia before he begins tattooing. While the anesthesia kicks in, we decide on

a soft rosy tone that's slightly lighter in the center of my lips to give the illusion of extra plumpness. Drummond uses a red lip pencil to trace the shape of my mouth, noting inconsistencies he'll camouflage: an area of my bottom lip that lacks a defined outline, and the half of my top lip that's less round than the other half.

I feel a slight pinch that makes my eyes water as Drummond starts tattooing, but the rest of the treatment feels painless, like a finger lightly running over my lips. For the next hour and a half, Drummond outlines my lips, then works from the perimeter inward. For this story, he allowed me to watch in a handheld mirror, which he doesn't typically do. I understand why: The pigments look much darker before they heal, and it's easy to panic. For the final 30 minutes, I put down the mirror and almost fall asleep.

THE RESULTS

You've got to have some faith. As with any tattoo, the color appears significantly more intense for the first few days. "Over the next one to two weeks, the color will heal to a soft pink," Drummond assures me. The first two days, my lips have a dark, raisin-like tone and feel dry and slightly sore, like a minor sunburn. I apply Aquaphor at least every hour. On day three, my lips start to flake and peel and take on a not-so-pretty patchy look, and by day four, only the dark outline hasn't flaked away. (Coworkers thought I was rocking statement lip liner. I was not.) After five days, my lips look and feel entirely normal, albeit slightly darker than usual. Now, more than a month later, they finally have the petal-pink color I was promised. And while I can't say I'm wearing lipstick less, I'm not nearly as reliant on it to feel put-together.



COLLAGE BY NICOLA KLOOSTERMAN.