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## TATTOO REACTIONS

Decorative tattooing has been practiced for thousands of years. Complications resulting from decorative tattoos are relatively rare considering the popularity of tattooing; however, the introduction of foreign substances into the skin can result in a toxic or immunologic response. The rate of complications after performing piercings or tattoos depends on the experience of the artist, the hygiene techniques applied, and the postprocedural care by the customer. However, some of these complications are unpredictable and depend on factors intrinsic to the customer.

### **RADIANT COLORS STRONGLY RECOMMENDS HAVING AN ALLERGY TEST DONE AT LEAST 72 HOURS BEFORE GETTING TATTOOED**

#### **Types of Reactions**

- Acute inflammatory reactions

Acute inflammatory reactions are associated with physical tissue injury and the injection of pigment dyes or metals into the skin. This reaction usually recedes without consequence within 2-3 weeks and is an expected adverse effect of the tattooing process.

- Hypersensitivity reactions

Once acute inflammatory changes have resolved, the most frequent reaction observed with tattoos is an allergic sensitivity to one of its pigments. Individuals may manifest sensitivity to a particular pigment in several ways. Most often, hypersensitivity reactions to a tattoo pigment are contact dermatitis and photoallergic dermatitis. These conditions may manifest as localized eruptions or, rarely, as an exfoliative dermatitis.

Allergic reactions to red tattoo pigments are the most common and may be caused by a variety of pigments, especially mercury sulfide (cinnabar). Patch testing may be positive for mercuric chloride but is not reliable for cinnabar. Alternative red dyes have been developed because of the problems associated with red tattoo pigment containing mercury; however, red tattoo reactions continue to be reported.

Photo-aggravated reactions are most commonly caused by yellow (cadmium sulfide) tattoo pigment. Swelling and redness of the skin may develop upon exposure to sunlight.

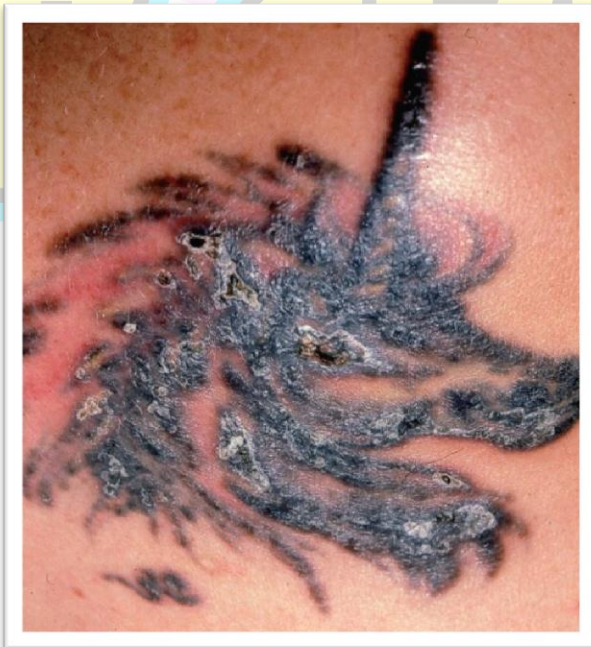
In contrast to hypersensitivity reactions to red tattoos, reactions to pigments used to create green, blue, and black tattoos are much less common. Chromium in green tattoo pigment is associated with localized eczema (atopic dermatitis) at the site of the pigment. Blue tattoos that contain cobalt have been linked to localized hypersensitivity reactions. Allergic reactions to black tattoo pigment are very rare. Presumably, these patients are sensitive to carbon.

## Treatment

An ink allergy will be itchy and raised only in spots of the particular color and is more likely to be a constant irritation rather than one that comes and goes. Topical ointments made for allergic reactions may help to relieve mild irritation, while a prescription drug or even tattoo removal may be required for more serious cases.

The weather is the most likely culprit when it comes to occasional but consistent irritation. Some people notice it only happens in the summertime. When temperatures and humidity rise, it can also cause your tattoo to swell slightly. This swelling causes a slight stretching of the skin, which also results in an itchy condition. A well-healed tattoo isn't likely to be damaged by scratching, but it's still best to try to avoid it. Topical anti-itch creams, ice or cool water can help to alleviate this discomfort temporarily until the weather becomes more skin-friendly again.

For others, it's just the opposite - the cold winter months and subsequent dry skin causes itchy, rashy tattoos. Dry skin, all by itself, can cause itchy rashes and it could just be a coincidence if one appears over a healed tattoo. But if the pigment under the skin is exposed to extreme cold, it could react to the temperature change in an adverse way. Keeping your skin moist with lotion and also avoiding extreme ups and downs in temperature can help with this problem.



Sources:

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