



Ophthalmology • Refractive Surgery
Laser, Cataract & Implant Surgery

Tattoo Removal

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Tattooing is the ancient art of permanent body painting, accomplished by inserting various pigments into the skin with a needle. These pigments, or inks, sometimes last much longer than we wish they did. Attempts at removing tattoos have generally not been as successful as the initial tattooing efforts.

Dermabrasion and the use of either argon or carbon dioxide lasers have been used to remove tattoos but these methods often cause scarring. Tattoo removal is most effective using a type of laser called a Q-switched laser, which removes most tattoos with less associated scarring. There are three types of Q-switched lasers: Ruby, Alexandrite, and Nd: Yag.

The laser emits very short flashes of light called pulses. Each pulse may produce discomfort similar to the snap of a rubber band against the skin. The laser uses light to disperse the pigment within the skin, permitting the body to reabsorb some of the pigment. Lasers are designed to produce light at very specific wavelengths. The tattoo pigment better absorbs the wavelength of light produced by the laser than the surrounding skin. The light absorption fades the tattoo pigment without injuring the surrounding skin.

Multiple treatments are typically required to remove a tattoo. Professional tattoos may require 6 to 10 treatments, while amateur tattoos may only require 4 to 6 treatments. The number of treatment sessions depends on the amount and type of ink used, and the depth of the ink in the skin. Dark blue, black and red inks respond best to treatment. Orange and purple inks respond well. Green and yellow inks are the most difficult to remove, although additional treatments can produce significant fading. Complete tattoo removal is rare.