



HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR TATTOO REMOVAL CLINIC

'QUESTIONS TO ASK' AND 'THINGS TO AVOID'

Just as it is with tattooists not all tattoo removal clinicians are equal, for this reason it is important to know which questions to ask and what to avoid when choosing your provider. The following information is designed to make it easier to select the right clinic.

Questions to ask:

- (1) [What sort of training have you had?](#)
- (2) [How much experience do you have?](#)
- (3) [Do you have the right laser?](#)
- (4) [Should I trust 'before & after' pictures?](#)
- (5) [What after care will my tattoo require?](#)
- (6) [Should I have a test patch?](#)

(1) What sort of training have you had?

Make sure your laser operator has received adequate training. Avoid those who have only undergone the training offered by the company who supplied their laser as this is not adequate and is not designed to be the

sole source of training an operator should have. Also avoid those who have only completed a tattoo removal course without further training. Ideally your laser operator should hold a 'Laser Safety Certificate' and have completed at least one tattoo removal course in addition to thorough 'in clinic' training under an existing skilled tattoo removalist. Courses alone are not adequate and are not geared to equip the laser operator to commence treatment without further training, they are preliminary training only, supervised 'in clinic' training is required before treatment can be safely executed. In addition, many of the courses on offer are being run by trainers who themselves have no 'in clinic' experience removing tattoos which means they are not qualified to offer the essential practical training required prior to commencing tattoo removal.

Also, if the clinic you have chosen introduces a new operator make sure you check thoroughly that they have previous experience and are not new to the industry. Because they are working on skin, tattoo removal clinicians must have an extremely high success rate, there is no room for error and this requires experience.

(2) How long have you been in practice? It's best to avoid new clinics, experience is everything when it comes to tattoo removal. Because the average removal takes around 18 months and heavily inked tattoos even longer, tattoo removalists who are in their first year or two of operation have not had time to finish an average removal and therefore do not have the experience to avoid removal pitfalls which can result in scarring, skin lightening or permanently embedded (trapped) ink. A minimum of two years' operation is essential. Having said this, length of time operating as a tattoo removal clinician alone is not enough to guarantee high quality treatment as some operators just fail to master the process, for this reason it is best to make the length of time they have been operating just one of the things you consider when evaluating a provider.

(3) Do you have the right laser? Laser tattoo removal should be carried out with a certified 'Grade 3(b)' or 'Grade 4' medical laser. There are many cheaper imitation lasers in the marketplace which claim to be certified. It is best to ascertain that the clinic you are commencing treatment with has certified equipment. Although, owning a high-quality laser alone does not guarantee high quality treatment. As with other tools and equipment it is the operator of the machine that dictates the quality of treatment you will receive. Having brand new equipment may also mean that the operator is brand new. It is the combination of high-quality equipment and a highly experienced operator which ensures successful tattoo removal.

(4) Should I trust 'before & after' pictures? Regarding 'before and after' pictorial, it's important to remember that clinics will only put their best results on display, and these may not represent their average or usual result. It would be far more useful for them to show you pictures of their worst results. Also ensure the the photos on the website are those of the technician that will be treating you. Generic or stock photos of removal are misleading and unethical. You should only be shown photos of the work of the technician you will be seeing.

Anyone who has searched the internet for tattoo removal 'before and after' pictures may have noticed that different clinics are quite often displaying the same pictures. This is because these pictures are supplied by the laser manufacturer when you purchase a laser for use by the laser purchaser before they have any results of their own to show. Some have been circulating for years, others are of tattoos which are very shallow or contain very little ink and therefore are removed more quickly than the average tattoo. It is wise to avoid any clinic displaying 'before and after' pictures you have seen elsewhere or fast results which seem too good to be true.

Another thing to beware of are clinics that are only displaying photos of tattoos that have only had their first few treatments (often 2 or 3 treatments). This indicates that they have not been open long enough to have completed a removal and have likely only been open for the time it takes to complete 2-3 treatments.

(5) What aftercare will my tattoo require? Enquiring about the aftercare that will be required is a very good way to assess a provider. Avoid any provider who mentions bleeding, scabbing, broken skin or wound care. Tattoo removal is a non-invasive process meaning that the top skin should not be broken and apart from in rare cases, none of the above should occur. Asking whether it will scar is also helpful. If the answer is yes, do not proceed with the provider. In rare cases tattoo removal may result in a scar and while you should be cautioned about this, it should not be expected as normal.

(6) Should I have a test patch? If in doubt about how skilled a tattoo clinician is it's always best to have a test patch before proceeding. If the skin is broken on the test area, if the test patch bleeds, scabs or requires wound care do not proceed with this provider.

Things to avoid:

- (1) New clinics with new laser operators
- (2) Those who don't specialise in tattoo removal
- (3) Providers quoting a very low number of treatments
- (4) Providers quoting an exact number of treatments
- (5) Out dated methods
- (6) IPL lasers
- (7) Treating too often
- (8) Relying entirely on online reviews
- (9) Those who say older tattoos are harder to remove (older tattoos are easier to remove)
- (10) Avoid clinics that encourage 'all up front payment'

(1) **Avoid new clinics with new laser operators** Avoid technicians in their first two years of operation, these technicians have not usually had time to complete enough removals to gain a thorough understanding of what a safe pace is and/or how to ensure the skin is not damaged throughout the whole process. Training alone does not supply this knowledge, only experience in the field can do this. Because of the rapid growth in the tattoo removal industry there is a lack of available experienced technicians meaning that new clinics are quite likely to have an inexperienced operator. This includes clinics that have added tattoo removal to the list of the treatments they offer.

(2) **Avoid those who don't specialise in tattoo removal** Avoid clinics that don't specialise in tattoo removal. If tattoo removal is just one of many treatments the clinic provides the laser clinician may not have spent extensive time removing tattoos and therefore lack experience.

(3) **Avoid providers quoting a very low number of treatments required** Perhaps the most dangerous thing you can do when it comes to tattoo removal is to have treatment with a provider who has estimated a very low number of treatments required. Tattoo removal providers (and laser manufacturers) are aware that often the main priority of prospective clients is to have their tattoo removed quickly. For this reason, they may quote a very low number of treatments needed to remove a tattoo, knowing that this will cause them to be chosen over providers who quote realistic numbers. Underestimating the number of treatments required is not a practice that experienced or reputable providers indulge in. There are tattoos which can be removed in a single session or just a few

sessions, these are very shallow tattoos like transparent shading and very old tattoos, especially those over 20 years old, but the typical professionally applied tattoo takes an average of ten sessions to remove. Beware of any provider who claims otherwise, this is a claim made only by inexperienced or unscrupulous providers and cannot be done.

It is advisable when seeking a tattoo removal provider that the condition of your skin during and after removal be your main priority and should take precedence over promises of very quick removal. Very few people are satisfied with a scar in exchange for a tattoo. Especially since tattoo removal scars usually resemble the tattoo they were meant to erase.

(4) Avoid providers quoting an exact number of treatments required

Avoid any provider who quotes an exact number of treatments required to remove a tattoo. It isn't possible to predict exactly how many treatments will be required prior to commencing treatment and estimates should be quoted in ranges - i.e. 1 to 5 treatments, 5 to 10 treatments. Providers who advise that your tattoo will take an exact number can usually be counted on to be underestimating the number required. Skilled and ethical providers quote in ranges which span the least through to the greatest number of treatments that it is expected will be required.

(5) Outdated methods Since the inception of laser tattoo removal, the way that lasers are used to remove tattoos has evolved. Initially many providers did little more than use the heat of the laser beam to burn the inked skin causing the body to replace this damaged skin with scar tissue that does not contain or hold ink. Over time it was realised that the ink could be removed without incurring skin damage and this early method of burning the inked skin was discarded. Sadly, it is not uncommon to see this early method still in use. Bleeding and/or scabbing after treatment is an indication that the provider is using the outdated method.

(6) IPL lasers Avoid IPL lasers. IPL lasers are completely unsuitable for tattoo removal. No reputable or well-trained provider would offer tattoo removal with an IPL laser.

(7) Treating too often Avoid providers who offer treatments any sooner than 8 weeks apart. The tattoo removal process requires intervals of at least 8 to 12 weeks between treatments to avoid the removal's progress from slowing down. It is not uncommon to be offered treatments as often as monthly. This will not reduce the time it takes to remove a tattoo and is a very good indicator that the provider is new to tattoo removal and probably more interested in charging their fee more often than

removing your tattoo.

(8) Relying entirely on online reviews Don't rely entirely on online reviews (good or bad) especially those posted on the tattoo removal clinic's own website. These can't be verified or relied upon and as with 'before and after' pictorial, only their best reviews will be on display. In addition, many businesses offer incentives for online reviews such as discounts, free products etc., which is not a reliable way to receive a review. Reviewers should be inspired to leave positive reviews by receiving service that they are happy with.

(9) Older tattoos are not harder to remove Avoid providers who advise that older tattoos are harder to remove than newer ones. This is not true and in fact the opposite is true. The older a tattoo is the less ink it contains and therefore the more easily it can be removed. Some providers have been found to be telling prospective clients that tattoos become harder to remove as they get older, they do this in order to encourage clients to enter treatment right away.

(10) Avoid clinics that encourage 'all up front' payment There are several reasons for this, one being that tattoos respond differently when being removed, depth, age (older tattoos contain less ink) and the type of ink are all factors that influence whether a tattoo will respond quickly or more slowly. This makes 'all up' quoting unsuitable for tattoo removal and traditionally the industry has not quoted this way. Also, the area being treated reduces in size over the course of the removal as the shallower areas disappear first and as this happens the per treatment cost should also reduce. This can't be predicted ahead of time and so it's not possible to accurately predict the true cost of removal. All up quoting can result in the maximum amount being paid.

We also do not advise paying for the full cost of removal 'up front' as this leaves the client unable to switch clinics if they are unhappy with the quality of their treatment and also has the added risk that their outlay could be lost if the business were to cease trading at any time during the course of their treatment. In addition paying up front means that there is a possibility that your removal will be rushed at the expense of your skin.