

Tattoo You

Bev Stevenson RN BN PNG
(Registered Nurse, Bachelor of Nursing, Pretty Nice Gal)

Bev Stevenson is a veritable human encyclopedia of somewhat useless, mostly amusing but occasionally helpful stories and dubious facts. She works as an Emergency Nurse in Calgary, a Stand Up Comic, and is a Strathcona Resident.

In my practice as a nurse, I have observed numerous & unusual tattoos, some of which are not obvious to the casual observer. (Remember – I see a lot of naked people). I chuckle when heavily tattooed patients insist they are deathly afraid of needles, but when I **see** the tattoo, all I can hear is my medical brain screeching, "HEPATITIS!" I decided to conduct some research to see if my fear was justified.

Tattoo art is increasingly popular but hardly a new concept. Evidence of permanently marking skin for ornamental purposes was traced to 3500 BC in Egypt. Although my research claimed that only 3 – 5% of people have tattoos, I seem to be the only person at the gym who **doesn't** have one! In Calgary, equal numbers of males and females are paying \$100 to \$150/hour for them. But generally, **WHY do people get them?** Many cite a sense of control, self-expression, and 'identification with some group which is seen as symbolic of their individuality spirituality or philosophy'. Sheesh – **in my day**, we just used to wear blue Woods jackets and grew our hair long to be cool.

Are Tattoos Safe?

Well, as with any invasive procedure, there are risks. Adverse reactions include infection, redness, and scarring. The Center for Disease Control (USA) clearly states that Hepatitis C and B transmission **does occur** via infected tattoo equipment, and there is also a risk of HIV infection.

Tattoo You?

Consider **all** pro's and cons before taking the plunge. Is a permanent tattoo really worth the health risks (and pain)? What if you don't like it? Will it be evident in future wedding photos? If you insist on getting tattooed, be smart about it. Shop around for a skilled technician who wears gloves and uses **only** sterilized equipment.

You should receive full post-procedure instructions to help you avoid infection – and then **follow them!**

What About Later?

It's not unusual for mature individuals to regret a previous youthful choice of body art. (Yosemite Sam isn't so attractive on a 40-year-old). The average cost to remove a single tattoo runs approximately **\$10,000**, generally requires 10 – 15 treatments over roughly 2 years and is not without the risks of infection or scarring. And after all of that, the tattoo may not be totally invisible!

My Advice

Don't put anything on your body forever that you wouldn't hang in your living room, and perhaps consider a lucrative career in tattoo removal!

*Originally published in the
Strathcona Gazette, March 2004.*