

Body art, begone

The laser de-inking process isn't painless or simple, as one writer finds. *By Alisha Mahon*

When I was 17, I walked into a tattoo parlor and offered my right ankle to the resident artist. But 13 years later, I look at the result and think, Yuck! I've wanted the large black sun (which looks more tarantula than solar flare) removed since college but never thought I could afford it—until I discovered a tattoo removal center that touted a \$49-per-square-inch price (about \$120 a session for my two-and-a-half-square inch flaming spider). There, nurses use lasers that break down the pigments, which are removed by your body's lymphatic system. I was told I would need five monthly treatments; it was a big commitment, but I said yes.

The first treatment took all of two minutes. But each zap felt like 100 rubber bands snapping against my skin. I spent the next week icing the area, applying ointment and changing the bandages.



My second session resulted in some scabbing, which healed in a week. But my third treatment was a scarier story. After studying the still-very-apparent tattoo, the nurse upped the laser's intensity. Twenty-four hours later, my tattoo was covered in large blisters and my foot had swollen to Fred Flintstone-like proportions. I had to take antibiotics to clear the infection. But that wasn't the only hiccup. At my fifth (and supposedly final) treatment, I was told I'd need at least four more to thoroughly remove the ink—the key words being at least. Today, after nine sessions, my tattoo is significantly lighter. No, laser surgery was not as simple or side effect-free as I thought it would be. Still, I continue my treatments. And I'm looking forward to the day that I can finally bid adieu to my tattoo.

Pull a (safe) disappearing act

In a survey of people ages 18 to 50, nearly one in four had tattoos, and about 17 percent of them regretted it. Do you have ink you wish were invisible? Jody Levine, M.D., a dermatologist in New York City, explains how to erase your art.

Choose a doctor An M.D. who specializes in laser removal has the proper schooling and access to the latest technology—important because "different lasers may need to be used over the course of a single tattoo removal, depending on the ink's depth and color," Dr. Levine says. Burns and scars are more likely to occur in tattoo parlors that offer removal and in medispas where the person wielding the laser is not an M.D. "Many women have come to me after unsuccessful attempts by nondoctors. In the end, it means more time and money," Dr. Levine says.

Be realistic about the pain Every zap of the laser feels like a rubber band snap. And the bigger the tattoo, the more hits it takes. "Apply a prescription anesthetic cream 40 minutes prior to a treatment, then cover the area in plastic wrap to increase absorption," Dr. Levine says.

Be patient Total removal takes at least six sessions. (Colored tattoos—yellow is most stubborn—and those bigger than 4 square inches can take more than a year.) Expect nearly a week of scabbing and possibly blistering after each session, plus twice-daily applications of an antibacterial ointment.

JUVEDERM Injectable Gel Important Patient Risk Information

In the U.S., JUVEDERM injectable gel is indicated for injection into the mid-to-deep dermis for correction of moderate to severe facial wrinkles and folds (such as nasolabial folds), and is generally well tolerated. The most commonly reported side effects are temporary injection site redness, swelling, pain/tenderness, firmness, lumps/bumps, and bruising. Exposure of the treated area to excessive sun and extreme cold weather should be minimized until any initial swelling and redness have resolved.

If laser treatment, chemical peel or any other procedure based on active dermal response is considered after treatment with JUVEDERM injectable gel, there is a possible risk of an inflammatory reaction at the treatment site.

Patients who are using substances that can prolong bleeding, such as aspirin or ibuprofen, as with any injection, may experience increased bruising or bleeding at injection site. You should inform your physician before treatment if you are using these types of substances. As with all skin injection procedures there is a risk of infection.

JUVEDERM injectable gel should be used with caution in patients on immunosuppressive therapy, or therapy used to decrease the body's immune response, as there may be an increased risk of infection. The safety of JUVEDERM injectable gel in patients with a history of excessive scarring (e.g., hypertrophic scarring and keloid formations) and pigmentation disorders has not been studied. JUVEDERM injectable gel should not be used in patients who have severe allergies marked by a history of anaphylaxis or history or presence of multiple severe allergies. JUVEDERM injectable gel should not be used in patients with a history of allergies to gram-positive bacterial proteins. The safety of JUVEDERM injectable gel for use during pregnancy, in breastfeeding females or in patients under 18 years has not been established. The safety and effectiveness of JUVEDERM injectable gel for the treatment of areas other than facial wrinkles and folds (such as lips) have not been established in controlled clinical studies.

Please go to www.juvederm.com to see a complete summary of risks and complications.