



June 23, 2015 – Grand Rapids, MI

## Do Tattoos Increase Skin Cancer Risk?

The other day, out of the blue, Paula asked me a question: “Do you think people with tattoos have more undetected skin cancer?” You can’t help but notice that more and more people of all ages are getting elaborate tattoos, some covering extensive parts of their arms and legs—the areas most likely to get increased exposure to the sun. A section of black ink could mask a rapidly growing black mole, for instance, and skin cancer could go unnoticed for longer.

Move forward 10 hours. I was changing to work out at the gym, and the guy a few lockers over had an unusual tattoo on his back in dark green ink. Right smack in the middle of where the tattoo changed direction was a black mole. If you weren’t looking for it, you wouldn’t know it was there. Between these two events, I decided it was time to investigate whether there was any link between tattoos and skin cancer.

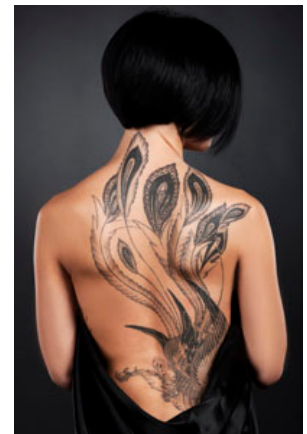
Based on a variety of polls, the number of Americans who have tattoos has increased to 21% in the past 10 years. The age-group with the highest percentage having at least one tat is 30 to 39 at 38%. That’s a lot of potential problems if the tattoos are giving cancer a place to hide.

Tattoos place metallic salts and organic dyes under the skin (1). Think about it: someone is injecting your skin thousands of times to get the design completed. What could go wrong? Infections and allergic reactions are commonplace, but can tattoos lead to increased skin cancer? We’ll talk about that the rest of the week.

What are you prepared to do today?

**Dr. Chet**

**Reference:** Dermatology. 2013;226(2):138-47.



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