



EUROPEAN
ACADEMY OF
DERMATOLOGY &
VENEREOLGY

Information Leaflet
for Patients

Tattoos and vitiligo



The aim of this leaflet

This leaflet is designed to help patients with vitiligo, who are planning to get a tattoo, to know when and how they can get a tattoo on their body.

Tattoos and vitiligo

Can I get a tattoo with vitiligo?

Living with vitiligo does not preclude you from getting a tattoo. A study has shown that a proportion of patients with vitiligo had one tattoo or more.

What complications am I exposed to with vitiligo?

You are exposed to the same complications as the general population.

These complications may include, but are not limited to:

- Contact eczema due to an aftercare product applied during tattoo healing.
- Delayed healing in the area of the tattoo.
- A blurry halo around the tattoo caused by ink diffusion into the subcutaneous fat.
- A local infection after tattooing, which can be bacterial or, more rarely, viral, fungal, or parasitic.
- An allergic reaction to a specific pigment, leading to chronic itchy bumps or lumps.
- Bumps and lumps within black tattoos (known as granulomas or chronic inflammatory reactions to black tattoo ink).
- Unsatisfactory aesthetic results.
- Tattoo regrets.

Vitiligo is also part of a group of conditions that can develop specifically on areas of skin that have experienced external trauma, such as chronic rubbing, surgical scars, scratches, or vaccination marks. This response is known as the Koebner phenomenon and affects individuals with vitiligo. Vitiligo could appear on tattooed skin following a tattoo application.

Can I get a tattoo if I have an active vitiligo?

As a general rule, people with active vitiligo should wait to get a tattoo until their skin condition has become stable. Getting a tattoo while vitiligo is active can trigger new white patches to appear within or around the tattooed area. Active vitiligo means that the condition is still changing – new white spots are appearing, or existing patches are getting larger.

Can I get a tattoo on an area of vitiligo?

Yes, you can get a tattoo on an area of vitiligo, if the vitiligo patch is fully settled. If the tattoo is planned both on a vitiligo patch and on non-affected skin, you must keep in mind that you might develop vitiligo lesions on the previously non-affected tattooed area.

Can I experience a flare of vitiligo on my body after getting a tattoo?

There is currently no data supporting that a flare of vitiligo can occur on the body after getting a tattoo.

Will vitiligo on my tattoo alter the design or color locally?

Vitiligo will not alter the design of the tattoo, nor will the tattoo fade or disappear. However, the lightening of the skin in the area may impact the colors of the tattoo compared to tattooed areas on non-affected skin.

Can I apply potent or highly potent local corticosteroids on my tattoos?

Yes, you can apply local corticosteroids as prescribed by your treating physician or dermatologist for vitiligo without risk for your healed tattoo.

Can I apply topical calcineurin inhibitors on my tattoos?

Yes, you can apply topical calcineurin inhibitors as prescribed by your treating physician or dermatologist for vitiligo without risk for your healed tattoo.

Can I apply local JAK inhibitors ointment on my tattoos?

Yes, you can apply local JAK inhibitors as prescribed by your treating physician or dermatologist for vitiligo without risk for your healed tattoo.

Can I get phototherapy if I have tattoos?

Yes, you can get phototherapy as prescribed by your treating dermatologist despite your tattoos. A short course of phototherapy will not affect the tattoo design or colors. However, we strongly discourage getting tattooed during phototherapy as phototherapy may lead to premature fading of tattoo colors.

General advice to patients with vitiligo who plan to get a tattoo

- Get a tattoo done by a professional tattoo artist in a tattoo parlor.
- Avoid home or garage tattooing ("scratching"), even if performed by a "professional."
- Inform the tattooist of your treatment and of the agreement of the prescribing doctor.
- If you have known contact allergies (e.g. to disinfectant or cosmetics), you should inform the tattooist, and check that only appropriate products are applied on the skin. If you do not find any suitable aftercare product, dry healing without any cream is an option.
- The tattooist should be trained for hygiene and asepsis. The EN 17169:2020 Tattooing – Safe and hygienic practice has been published in January 2020. It specifies hygiene requirements before and during tattooing and for aftercare. It gives guidelines for tattooists and their routine interactions with clients and public authorities. It gives guidelines for the correct procedures to be used to ensure optimum protection of the client, the tattooist and others in the tattoo work area.
- Follow the after-care procedure and respect the advice, as given by the tattooist. There is no reason to apply an antiseptic as a preventive measure.
- Do not get a tattoo if you are under phototherapy for vitiligo.
- Consult your GP or your dermatologist in case of an unusual reaction after tattooing.
- Significant number of people with tattoos experience some level of regret about their tattoos. The reasons for regret can vary widely. However, complete removal is not guaranteed. Complications may include hypertrophic or atrophic scarring. The current best treatment of tattoo removal is using a laser with specific wavelengths targeting pigments in the skin. Tattoo laser removal should be performed by a specialist with a good experience with tattoo removal.

While every effort has been made to ensure that the information given in this leaflet is accurate, not every treatment will be suitable or effective for every person. Your own clinician will be able to advise in greater detail.