

Forever yours?

IF YOU FORGOT TO THINK BEFORE YOU INKED, THE OPTIONS FOR TEMPORARY OR PERMANENT TATTOO REMOVAL ARE PROMISING, BUT SUCCESS IS NOT GUARANTEED – AS LASER EXPERT **DR PHILIP DOBSON** EXPLAINS TO MARGUERITE FOULKES



According to research website Ask Jeeves (uk.ask.com), tattoo removal is one of the most popular topics for questions. Last summer, their survey revealed that one in five adults has a permanent tattoo – but 23 per cent of them admitted they now regret it. 'In the past four years I have seen a tremendous increase in the number of patients seeking to have a tattoo removed,' confirms consultant plastic surgeon Mr Paul Banwell. 'But it's not that straightforward: the patient's skin type and medical history, the size and location of the tattoo and the type of pigments used need to be carefully considered before starting any treatment.'

Photo: Thinkstock

SKIN CAMOUFLAGE

? HOW IT WORKS

Highly pigmented skin camouflage crèmes can hide delicately coloured tattoos with just one application. A complementary colour (applied under the skin matching colour) is usually required for a black or vividly coloured tattoo. Each layer of crème needs to be set with loose, colourless fixing powder. Use fixing spray in addition for extra hold and sun protection. Paramedical camouflage brand Dermacolor offers a wide range of suitable products.

⊕ BEST FOR

Occasional use, or long-term use if tattoo can't be removed by any other method.

✓ PROS

Instant result, natural appearance and long-lasting, weatherproof effect. Dermacolor Home Cover Kit is available in three skin tone shades and 16 colours, making acceptable colour match likely.

✗ CONS

Needs to be reapplied every day.

● EXPERT COMMENT

'Creating the correct complementary and skin colour match does require the person to see a skilled camouflage practitioner,' advises Elizabeth Allen, principal tutor and trustee of the British Association of Skin Camouflage (BASC), a charity who trains professionals in the skills required to provide a camouflage service (skin-camouflage.net). 'They will assess the colour of the tattoo and create a simple complementary colour mixture, as well as an acceptable skin match colour. The practitioner will demonstrate the application techniques, and also advise on how to maintain the camouflage.'

€ **PRICE** £20.99 (basic kit), £32.49 (basic kit with fixing spray).

📍 **FROM** Extreme Make-up, 0800 0582 682, extrememakeup.co.uk.

LASER

? HOW IT WORKS

See box. 'The most difficult tattoos to remove are those which do not have a correspondingly coloured laser. Yellow ink is particularly problematic,' says Dr Dobson. Also tricky: multicoloured tattoos, as well as deep tattoos or patterns that have been over-tattooed. 'Before any treatment, you must undergo a medical assessment and a test patch. On average, six to 12 sessions are required, three to four weeks apart - depending on size of tattoo, depth of pigment, type of pigment, and your skin type,' explains Sarah Williams, a member of the British Medical Laser Association.

⊕ BEST FOR

Most blue and black tattoos on light-skinned patients.

✓ PROS

80 to 95 per cent clearance in the best-case scenario, with minimal scarring.

✗ CONS

Treatment can be painful. Treated area may swell, blister, bruise and bleed, with crusting of the skin for up to ten days. Up to one in 20 people treated may develop permanent scars or skin discolouration. People with dark or pigmented skin are at higher risk.

● EXPERT COMMENT

'Patients seeking treatment for tattoos should visit a clinic experienced in the process and able to manage any of the complications. The clinic should be registered with the Care Quality Commission for maximum safety as they will be providing medical treatments to their patients in addition to tattoo removal,' advises Dr Dobson.

€ **PRICE** From £80 and up to £200 per session, depending on size of the tattoo.

📍 **FROM** Clinics nationwide. Sarah Williams practises in Brighton, Hove and East Grinstead (laserandskin.co.uk).

SURGERY

? HOW IT WORKS

'Surgical tattoo removal involves excising the tattoo and suturing the skin,' explains consultant plastic surgeon Mr Paul Banwell. 'This can be done in one sitting, with a straight-line scar in the case of a small tattoo and if the skin has enough laxity. Other tattoos may require "serial excision": they are removed in several steps, three to four months apart. Some tattoos are so big that they would require skin grafting (with a patch of skin usually removed from the patient's thigh). This is a very rare and extreme method as it causes bad scarring.'

⊕ BEST FOR

Small tattoos. Also, whenever laser has failed or cannot be used.

✓ PROS

For small tattoos, surgery can be cheaper, quicker and give better results.

✗ CONS

Surgery leaves scars. It is contraindicated for patients with a history of bad scarring.

● EXPERT COMMENT

'Before embarking on a costly and lengthy treatment, consult a plastic surgeon to assess your options. It is important to have realistic expectations with the treatment, or learn to live with the tattoo,' says Mr Banwell.

€ **PRICE** From £250.

📍 **FROM** Clinics nationwide. Mr Paul Banwell consults at Spire Tunbridge Wells and McIndoe Surgical Centre, East Grinstead (0845 260 0261, paulebanwell.com).

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