

Choosing a body artist: What you need to know for a safe experience

By Nikki Peterson

Getting a tattoo or piercing can be an exciting and personal decision. It is important to prioritize your health and safety when choosing a body artist. Here are some essential tips so you have a safe and positive experience.

Research the artist & ask questions: Take time to research potential artists and their studios. Don't hesitate to ask questions. A reputable artist will be open and informative. Things to look for:

- **Portfolio & experience:** Examine the artist's previous work. This will give you an idea of their style and skill level. Ask them how long they have been tattooing/piercing and if they have experience with the specific design you want.
- **Reviews and recommendations:** Check online reviews and ask friends for recommendations. Positive feedback from past clients is a good sign.

Verify licensing and certifications: Make sure the tattoo or piercing artist and the studio are properly licensed. Regulations can vary by county, but in Yellowstone County all artists performing tattoos or piercings must be licensed as well as the studio they work in. This includes cosmetic tattooing. Licenses are issued annually and are valid for the calendar year. Ask your artist if they have certifications in bloodborne pathogen prevention and first aid.

Inspect the studio: A clean and safe environment is crucial. When you visit a studio, consider:

- **Cleanliness:** The studio should be well-lit, clean and well-organized. The procedure area should be free of unnecessary items with plenty of supplies.
- **Sterilization practices:** Supplies used must be single-use and disposable when possible. Some of the supplies like sterile needles, must be dated and used before they expire. Needles should also be opened in front of the client immediately before the procedure. All jewelry used in a new piercing must be sterilized prior to insertion.
- **Skin preparation and infection control:** Before starting the procedure, the artist must wash their hands and put on gloves. An antiseptic must be applied to skin to reduce bacteria on the surface of the skin. Alcohol, iodine, and bactine are examples of antiseptics commonly used during tattooing or piercing procedures. Throughout the procedure the artist must use safe practices to prevent spread of bacteria and viruses. Used equipment and supplies must not come into contact with new supplies.

Understand health risks: All tattoos and piercings come with some level of risk, including infections and allergic reactions. Inform your artist about any allergies, particularly to inks or metals. Discuss any health conditions (e.g., diabetes, skin conditions, bleeding disorders) that may affect your healing process. The artist may ask for a written physician referral prior to doing the procedure.

Follow aftercare instructions: Proper aftercare is essential for healing and minimizing complications, like infections. After getting your tattoo or piercing, follow your artist's aftercare recommendations carefully. Aftercare instructions must be given to the client verbally and in writing.

Know your rights: As a client, you have rights. Be sure to:

- **Discuss policies:** Understand the studio's policies on deposits, cancellations and touch-ups.
- **Communicate concerns:** If you have concerns during the process, voice them to your artist.
- **Report complaints:** If you experience an adverse reaction like an infection or allergic reaction after the procedure, please seek medical care then call RiverStone Health to report the issue.

Choosing the right tattoo or piercing artist is a vital step in ensuring a safe and enjoyable experience. By researching, asking questions and prioritizing cleanliness and professionalism, you can make an informed decision. Remember, this is a long-term commitment, so take your time in choosing the right artist for you.

For more information on safe tattoo practices and to find licensed artists in your area, visit RiverStoneHealth.org/body-art.

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