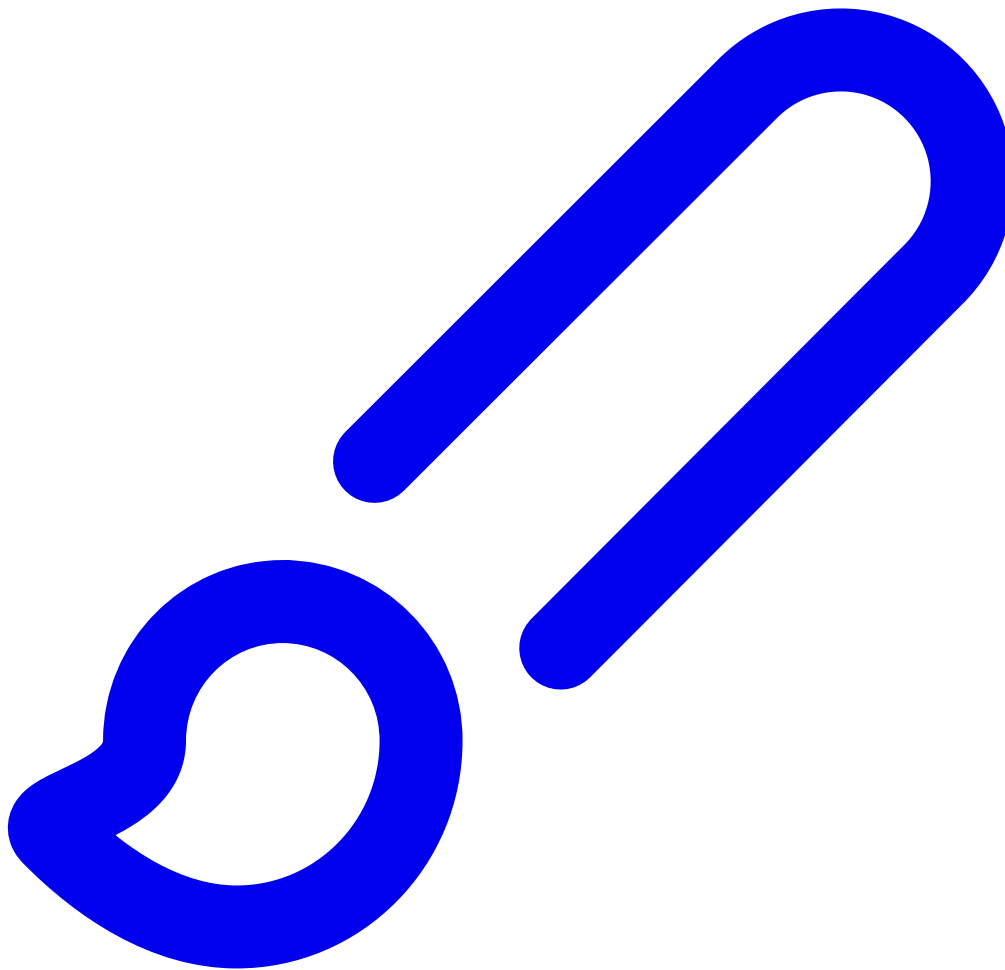




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Tattoo Aftercare Guide: How to Heal a New Tattoo Properly

By the [Double Down Tattoo Editorial Team](#) · Reviewed against our [editorial standards](#) · 8 min read · Last reviewed 2026

Disclaimer: This article is for general information only and is not medical advice. Consult a qualified healthcare professional before making decisions about your health or treatment.

Tattoo Aftercare Guide: How to Heal a New Tattoo Properly

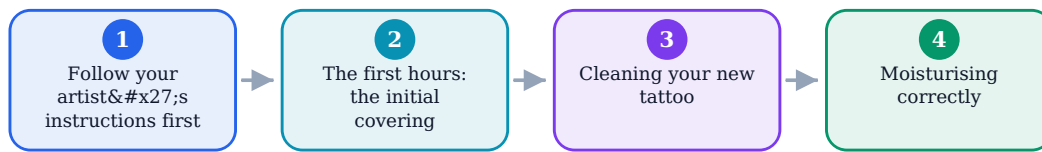


Figure: Tattoo Aftercare Guide: How to Heal a New Tattoo Properly

Getting a great tattoo is only half the story — how you care for it while it heals has a major effect on how it ultimately looks. A new tattoo is essentially an open wound, and proper aftercare protects both your skin and the artwork. Neglect it and you risk fading, patchiness, or worse.

This guide covers general, step-by-step tattoo aftercare to support healing and protect your tattoo. Always follow your own artist's specific instructions, as their advice takes priority over any general guide.

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Follow your artist's instructions first

Before any general advice, remember this: your **artist's specific instructions** take priority. They know exactly what they did and what products and methods they recommend. Aftercare guidance varies, and practices differ between artists and studios. Use this guide for general understanding, but if it ever conflicts with your artist's advice, follow your artist.

The first hours: the initial covering

Your artist will cover the fresh tattoo with a bandage or protective film. **Leave it on for as long as your artist advises** — this protects the wound during its most vulnerable stage. When it's time, remove it gently with clean hands. Don't rush this step or leave the covering on longer than instructed; timing matters and your artist will tell you

theirs.

Cleaning your new tattoo

Keeping the tattoo **clean** is essential to prevent infection. Wash your hands first, then gently clean the tattoo with lukewarm water and a mild, fragrance-free soap using your fingertips — no scrubbing, cloths or sponges. Rinse thoroughly and **pat** (never rub) it dry with a clean paper towel or let it air dry. Do this gently and as often as your artist recommends.

Moisturising correctly

Once clean and dry, apply a **thin layer** of the aftercare product your artist recommends. The key word is *thin* — over-applying can suffocate the skin and hinder healing. The goal is to keep the tattoo lightly moisturised so it doesn't dry out and crack, not to slather it. Repeat as advised throughout the healing period, always with clean hands.

What to avoid while healing

Certain things can damage a healing tattoo. **Don't pick or scratch** scabs or flaking skin — let them come off naturally, as picking can pull out ink and cause scarring. Avoid **soaking** it (baths, pools, the sea), keep it out of **direct sunlight**, don't wear tight or dirty clothing over it, and resist touching it with unwashed hands. Itching is normal; gently patting, not scratching, helps.

Healing timeline and warning signs

The outer skin typically heals over a few weeks, though deeper healing continues longer — and it's normal to see some scabbing, flaking and itching along the way. Be patient and keep up your care throughout. Importantly, watch for **signs of infection** — spreading redness, increasing pain, swelling, heat, pus or fever. If you notice these or anything concerning, seek **medical advice promptly**. This guide is general information, not medical advice.

Do and don't during healing

Good aftercare is mostly about consistency and avoiding a few key hazards. This quick reference captures the essentials:

Do	Don't
Follow your artist's specific instructions	Ignore their advice for generic tips online
Wash gently with clean hands	Scrub, pick or scratch the tattoo
Apply a thin layer of recommended product	Over-moisturise or smother it
Keep it out of direct sun	Soak it in baths, pools or the sea
Let scabs flake off naturally	Peel scabs, which can pull out ink

When in doubt, defer to what your artist told you — they know exactly what they did

and what your skin needs.

A rough healing timeline

Knowing what's normal helps you avoid unnecessary worry:

- **First days:** tender, possibly red, may weep a little — keep it clean.
- **First week or so:** flaking and light scabbing as the surface heals.
- **A few weeks:** surface healed but deeper layers still settling; may look slightly dull.
- **Full settling:** can take longer as skin fully recovers.

Timelines vary between people and tattoos, so treat this as a general guide.

Warning signs and when to seek help

Most tattoos heal without incident when cared for properly, but it's important to recognise the difference between normal healing and signs that need attention. Some redness, tenderness, mild swelling and a little weeping in the first days are expected, as is flaking and itchiness as the skin repairs itself. What isn't normal is redness that spreads and worsens rather than settling, increasing pain after the first few days, significant swelling, heat, pus, or a fever — these can indicate an infection or a reaction and warrant prompt medical advice rather than waiting to see if they improve. An allergic reaction to ink, though uncommon, can also occur and may show as persistent itching, rash or raised skin around specific colours. Because a tattoo is essentially a wound while it heals, treating clear warning signs seriously protects both your health and the final result, since infections can damage the appearance of the tattoo as well. If you're ever unsure whether something is normal, contacting your artist for guidance is a sensible first step, and seeking medical care when symptoms suggest infection or a reaction is always the right call. This article is general information and not medical advice; a qualified healthcare professional should assess any concerning symptoms.

Printable checklist

Print this page or save the PDF to keep these steps handy.

- ☐ Follow your artist's instructions first
- ☐ The first hours: the initial covering
- ☐ Cleaning your new tattoo
- ☐ Moisturising correctly
- ☐ What to avoid while healing
- ☐ Healing timeline and warning signs
- ☐ Do and don't during healing
- ☐ A rough healing timeline

Summary

A new tattoo is a wound and needs proper care to heal well. General aftercare involves leaving the initial covering on as instructed, then gently washing with clean hands and mild soap, applying a thin layer of a suitable aftercare product, and keeping it clean and moisturised. Avoid picking, scratching, soaking, and direct sun. Healing takes weeks. Follow your artist's specific instructions, and seek medical advice if you notice signs of infection. This is general information, not medical advice.

Key Takeaways

- A new tattoo is a wound and needs proper care to heal well.
- Always follow your artist's specific aftercare instructions first.
- Wash gently with clean hands and apply a thin layer of aftercare product.
- Never pick or scratch scabs, and avoid soaking and direct sun.
- Seek medical advice if you notice signs of infection.

Frequently Asked Questions

How long does a tattoo take to heal?

The surface usually heals over a few weeks, while deeper healing continues longer. Timelines vary by person, size and placement. Keep up proper care throughout and follow your artist's guidance.

Can I use any moisturiser on my tattoo?

Use the product your artist recommends and apply it thinly. Avoid heavy, fragranced or unsuitable products. If unsure, ask your artist rather than guessing.

What are signs my tattoo might be infected?

Spreading redness, increasing pain, swelling, heat, pus or fever can indicate infection. If you notice these or feel unwell, seek medical advice promptly. This information is general and not a substitute for professional care.

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