

Tattoo Aftercare Instructions – Traditional Bandage

Supplies

- Clean paper towels
- Unscented hypoallergenic soap – I use Dr. Bronner's Baby Unscented Pure-Castile Soap.
- Tattoo aftercare moisturizer – I use coconut oil & Hustle Butter; other options include pure shea butter & Tattoo Goo. Fragrance-Free Lubriderm and Aveeno Daily Moisturizing Lotion are suitable to use starting on day 4 of the aftercare process.

The Bandage

At the end of your tattoo session, a thin layer of tattoo cream will be applied to your fresh ink before it is covered with a bandage.

Your fresh ink is essentially an open wound. The bandage helps to protect the skin from bacteria and friction from clothing and other sources. The bandage should be kept on for a minimum of 4 hours and be kept out of direct sunlight. Ideally, it should stay on until an hour before your bedtime if your session finished in the afternoon/evening, or until the next morning, if you session finished at night. It's best to check with your artist.

The First Wash

Before you remove the bandage, wash your hands thoroughly and dry them with a clean paper towel. Do not use previously used cloth towels to dry your hands, as these can harbour bacteria, mould, and chemical residues -definitely not substances you want making contact with your fresh tattoo.

Next, gently removed the bandage and discard it. It is normal for there to be some blood, plasma (gooey substance), and ink. Turn the tap on and adjust the temperature to lukewarm. Wash your hands thoroughly a second time and leave the water running. Using your hands, apply water to the tattoo until the area is damp. Do not stick your fresh tattoo under the tap. Lather up your hands with the tattoo aftercare soap of your choice. Apply the lather to your fresh tattoo and gently wash the area

using a circular motion with your fingers. As the moisturizer comes off, it may appear as if the tattoo is oozing ink or a gooey substance. This is common at this stage and not cause for concern.

Finish washing your tattoo by using your hands to apply water to the area to gently rinse it. Dry your hands with a clean paper towel and use it to turn off the tap. Take a fresh paper towel and pat the tattoo dry. Do not rub (because ouch!) and do not use a cloth towel for the reasons listed earlier. Allow your tattoo to air dry for about 45 minutes. Once the area is completely dry, wash your hands thoroughly, dry them with paper towel, and then apply a very, very thin layer of the tattoo aftercare moisturizer of your choice. Do not rub it on; instead, gently pat it on the area. Take a paper towel and dab the area to ensure any excess moisturizer is removed.

I would strongly recommend throwing a freshly washed set of sheets on your bed before sleeping in it with your new tattoo. Bear in mind that during your sleep, you may have some ink seepage from your tattoo end up on your sheets, so don't use your best set! Also, you can take a fresh paper towel and loosely cover your tattoo with it, only taping it on the edges. It's very important that the tattoo can still breathe! This can act as a barrier as you sleep and reduce friction between your sheets and your new ink and also prevent any seepage from coming into contact with your bedding.

The First Few Days

Continue washing the new tattoo morning and night, using the techniques outlined above. If you are very active or in a hot environment, it may be necessary to wash the tattoo more often. If you have questions or concerns about washing frequency, it's best to check in with your artist.

In the initial healing phase, as the tattoo scabs, the ink usually appears darker. It is also normal for the new tattoo to have a slightly red or pink appearance and to feel warmer than the surrounding area. This should gradually subside over the first few days and resolve completely by the end of the first week. If these conditions persist or increase, they may be signs of an infection. It's a good idea to seek medical attention and check in with your artist.

The Second Week

Using the instructions above, continue washing the tattoo 1 – 2 times a day, or as needed.

By the start of the second week, the tattoo will likely become itchy as the scabs become flaky and start to shed. They will come off naturally, when ready. This is not a process we want to expedite. That means no itching or scratching. You also want to be extra gentle when washing, drying, and moisturizing the tattoo. Premature removal of the scabs can lead to complications with healing, such as ink loss, increased scarring, and longer healing times.

Keeping the tattoo moisturized may help to reduce the itch (but be careful not to over moisturize). Using a cold compress can also help. If the itching is particularly bothersome, you can consult your pharmacist about over the counter oral medications, such as Benadryl, that can minimize the itch.

The Third Week & beyond

Your tattoo may appear to be mostly healed by this time; however, it can take 6 weeks or longer for the deeper layers of skin to fully heal. Handpoked tattoos tend to heal faster than machine tattoos, but this can vary from person to person.

The itch should subside as the scabs heal fully and are replaced by healthy skin. Continue washing the tattoo daily and keep the area moisturized and out of the sun. Do not start using sunscreen until the tattoo is fully healed.

Ink rejection or allergy

It is possible for the body to have an allergic reaction to the ink. This is rather uncommon with black and grey inks, and is more likely to occur with coloured inks. Reactions can manifest differently for different people, but the most common is a painful rash, with raised little bumps on the skin. Sometimes, it can be hard to identify as many of the symptoms are similar

to those of the normal tattoo healing process. If you have concerns, it's best to seek medical attention and contact your artist.

A Few Reminders During the Healing Phase

Dos

- Make sure you have the appropriate aftercare supplies on hand, such as an unscented hypoallergenic soap, tattoo aftercare moisturizer, and fresh paper towels.
- Before washing your tattoo, always wash your hands first.
- Use clean paper towels to pat the tattoo dry.
- Allow your tattoo to air dry completely after patting it dry, and before applying moisturizer.
- Moisturize regularly, but not excessively.
- If your tattoo becomes sweaty or comes into contact with dirt or other substances, follow the washing instructions outlined above.
- Outside of washing, minimize the tattoo's contact with water.
- Drink a lot of water to promote healing and healthy, hydrated skin.
- Protect your healing tattoo from exposure to sunlight by keeping it covered with loose fitting clothing.

Don'ts

- Do not rub the area or use cloth towels to dry the tattoo.
- Do not over moisturize.
- Do not submerge the tattoo in water until it is fully healed.
- Do not pick or itch the scabs!
- No sweaty workouts for at least the first week.
- No saunas for the first 3 weeks.
- Do not expose your healing tattoo to sunlight.
- Do not use sunscreen on the area until the tattoo is fully healed.
- Outside of the aftercare supplies mentioned, do not use any other products on your tattoo while it is healing.
- Do not shave over the area (duh) until it is full healed.