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New generation lasers zap stubborn tattoos



By ABC7

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WALNUT CREEK, Calif.

Wayne Bland paid a painful price for his loyalty to the heavy metal band AC/DC. Not long after he tattooed the group's logo on his arm, he started noticing a reaction on his skin.

"Eventually it started swelling to the point that it hurt," Bland said.

It turns out that Bland was allergic to a compound in the blue ink used in the tattoo's lettering. To make matter's worse, the color is notoriously hard to remove, even with commonly used lasers. He eventually turned to Walnut Creek dermatologist Dr. Christine Lee.

"Usually blues and greens never go away," Lee said. "With a weak laser, you could do 16-20 treatments and not get anywhere."

To remove the stubborn blue ink, Lee will employ two separate lasers, both FDA approved to treat tattoos and pigmented lesions. The first, known as the Picosure, delivers an ultra-short burst of energy designed to physically shatter the ink particles. Each pulse is delivered in one-trillionth of a second.

Then, Lee follows up with a powerful second laser known as the Fotona, which can deliver four separate wavelengths allowing it to treat multi-colored tattoos.

The sessions are typically repeated several more times over the course of weeks or months. Lee says the new generation lasers are able to completely erase blue and green ink without leaving smudges behind and generally work about twice as fast as earlier technologies. Still, the treatments can cost anywhere from a few hundred dollars to a several thousand depending on the size of the tattoo.

For Bland, the considerations go beyond the cosmetic to simply reducing the pain.

"Ideally, I'd just like the inflammation to stop," he said.

While the newer lasers are more powerful, Lee says the short bursts tend to be safer than older technologies that could leave behind scars in the case of larger or more difficult to remove tattoos.

Written and produced by Tim Didion

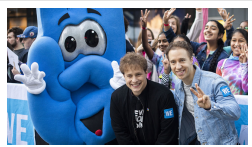
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