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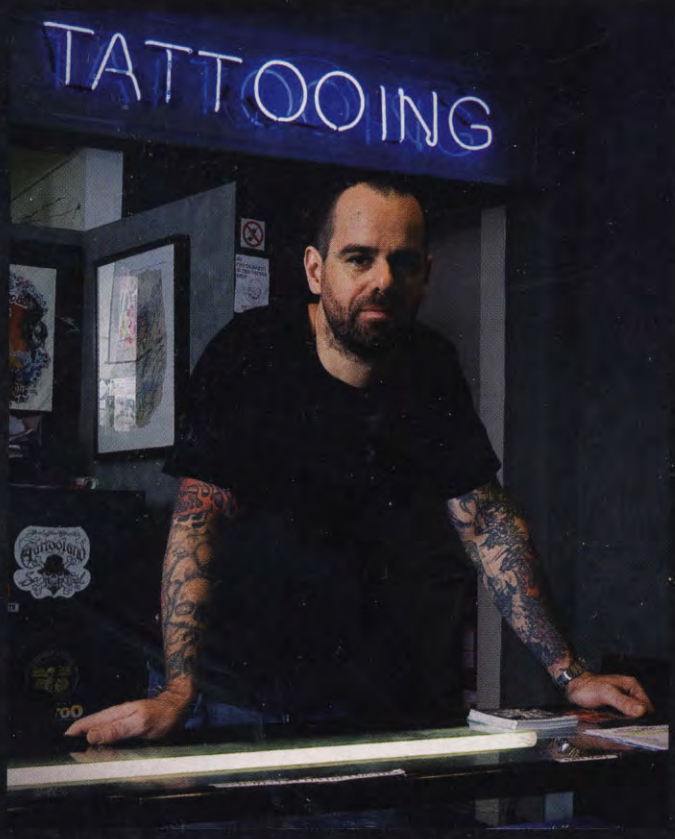

AUTHENT/INK

Australian Ink's resident tattoo advisor Kian Forreal shares some healing words on tattoo aftercare

I WANT TO SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT ON A SUBJECT that I talk about every day at the shop. Be advised, this is by no means the 'definitive' be-all-end-all treatise on the subject... but after 17 years in the chair I think I can weigh in on the subject of tattoo aftercare with some authority.

Every artist has his or her own way they like to tell their clients to heal their work and everyone recommends the kind of cream they think works best for them, and fair enough, this isn't meant to contradict anyone else's method or protocol or say anyone else is wrong. This is just my way. This is what I tell my clients every day – so if you're interested, listen up!

There are two types of healing methods I use, one where the tattoo is re-bandaged and the other where the tattoo is left open after the initial bandage has been taken off. We'll start with the open method first, which I recommend for outlines, smaller tattoos in places where there isn't much contact with clothes or shoes rubbing on them and people who are just going to chill for 4-5 days while their tattoos heal.

OPEN METHOD

After being tattooed you've either been bandaged with cling film or a gauze-type covering most likely. Take this off after 2-12 hours, whatever is most convenient, as it doesn't make a difference in the early stages. Wash your hands first before washing your tattoo, everytime.

For the initial wash only use a face cloth or corner of towel and give your tattoo a good washing with warm soapy water and get all the blood, Vaseline and ink off it. It should feel nice and smooth after this washing. If it feels slimy then keep washing. Once this has been done then pat it dry with a clean towel and let it air out.

For the first two days I don't recommend putting any cream on it. Wash it gently everyday, morning and night using warm soapy water and your fingertips, using no cloth at all. Pat it dry; no cream.

A lot of people will balk at that, but it makes it heal faster to let it breathe, the body heals fine on its own. The cream is just to prevent dryness and cracking and if overused will suffocate the tattoo and make it goopy and scabby and leach colour from it. This is bad. That said, sleep with clean sheets in the case of your fresh tattoo coming into contact with your bed, alternatively (as an example) wear a clean T-shirt to prevent your arm tattoo

from sticking to the sheets and use the water from the shower to slowly unstick your tattoo from your shirt in the morning. Don't pull it off, that's what causes scabbing.

Day 3-7. When it starts to feel dry and tight you can apply a small amount of cream to it, rub it in gently until it disappears and use a paper towel to dab off the excess if there is any left after five minutes. A lot of people recommend Bepanthen Cream – its ok, but I don't use it. I find it too greasy and unnecessary. I prefer Vaseline Intensive Care Lotion in the Vitamin E flavour. This is a very light, easily absorbable cream that doesn't cause pimples or colour leaching. I like it and my clients like it. In my experience, using it 1-3 times per day for 5-10 days after the initial couple days usually suffices. Use as little cream as possible. Once the tattoo has flaked off and the skin is dry and milky you can use as much as you like. This is good for the tattoo at this point. It's that easy, now the other way...

RE-BANDAGE METHOD

I advise my clients to re-bandage their tattoos when we've done large coverage or the tattoo is in a place where it has constant contact with clothes rubbing on it throughout the day. Follow the above instructions, as everything is the same as the first method up until the point of letting it air out. At this stage on Day 1-3, after the tattoo has dried out some, re-apply a fresh piece of cling film to cover the tattooed area. Do not apply cream to the skin beforehand, it's not necessary. Just wrap it up and tape it in place and put your clothes, shoes, pants or whatever over the bandage and don't worry about it! This method makes it easy to sleep with as well because there's no sticking to the sheets.

Morning and night you should remove the bandage, clean your tattoo as outlined above, dry it, and re-apply a fresh piece of cling film. On the morning of the 4th day after getting tattooed you can remove your bandage for the last time and not apply another one. Just let it air out after washing and drying it.

You can follow the same instructions for the application of cream as above as well, give it a day or two after removing the last bandage or until your tattoo feels dry and tight. And that's it!

Now some simple things to remember and follow:

- No sun at all, ever, for the first 3-4 weeks on your new tattoo. It will destroy it. Do not apply sun block to your tattoo for the first 4 weeks.
- No swimming for the first 7-10 days, longer for chlorine pools. The tattoo must have totally flaked off and be smooth before being submerged in the water for any amount of time. Showers are ok, baths and spas are not.
- No picking, rubbing, scratching or 'helping off' of scabs or fresh tattoo areas. This is very important as it will result in colour loss.
- Lastly, go easy on training at the gym while healing as the constant expanding and contracting of the tattooed skin area will certainly cause scabbing of your tattoo.

Kian Forreal is a professional tattoo artist with 17 years international experience and specialising in traditional Japanese tattoo work. He has worked all over the world and has studied under some of the leading tattoo artists of today. He is [illegible] in Sydney at Inner Vision Tattoo, Surry Hills. For more, visit **www.kian[illegible]com** *or, for information on Laser Tattoo Fading and Removal, please [illegible]w.fadeyourtattoo.com.*