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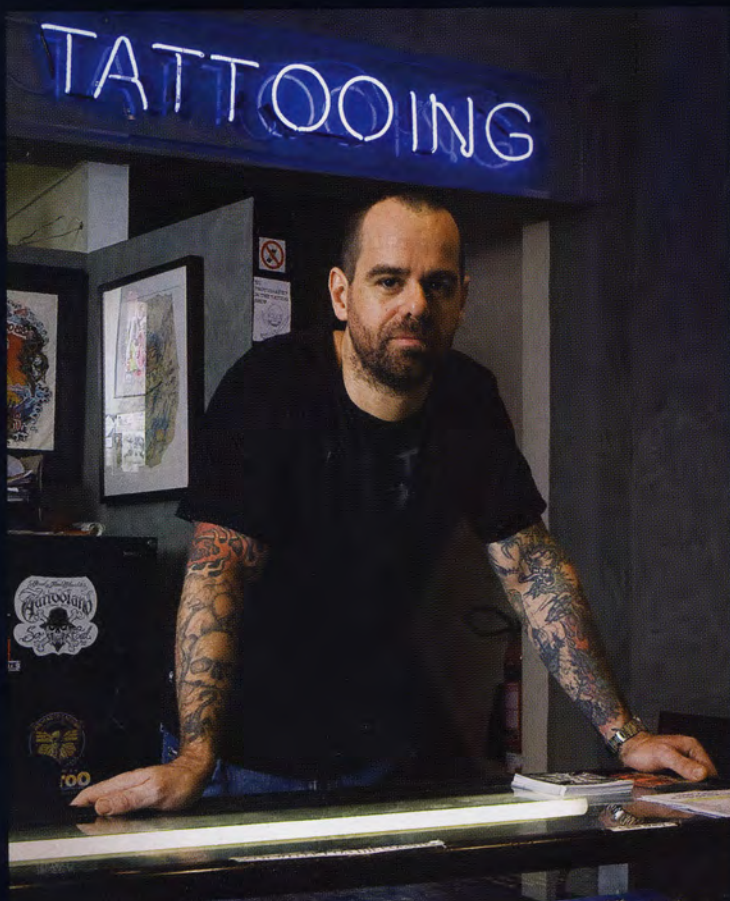
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## AUTHENT/INK

**Inked Australia's resident tattoo advisor  
Kian Forreal on protecting your precious  
artwork during summer**

**SUMMER IS FINALLY HERE AND, FOR THE MOST PART**, the sun is shining and burning bright. If you're a tattooed soul then conventional wisdom says you have little choice at this time of year – either cover up, apply a high SPF sun cream, or risk destroying your coveted artwork.

Truth of the matter, however, is that your choices are much wider than what you'd believe. If you really want to save your ink from damage – and please note, for the most part we're talking about saving your ink, not your skin – then pay close attention to this article.

If you can't or won't cover up your tattoo with thick clothing to block the summer's particularly harmful UV rays, then sun protection is your only option. However, there is so much misinformation released to the public about how to protect oneself from the sun that it's hard to know what to believe. When considering how to protect your tattoo from the sun, you need to realise that the tattoo pigment that is buried in your skin has different needs to the rejuvenating skin itself. Once pigment has been damaged, it cannot repair itself.

Without getting too complicated, let's run through what happens when the sun shines down on you. The sun releases a whole lot of energy, but what we are focusing on is the invisible ultraviolet (UV) light that is the most damaging to skin. While we cannot see this UV light, we can certainly feel its warmth.

The ozone layer filters out UVC, which is the most dangerous UV light, while UVA and UVB make it down to our level and penetrate our skin with their damaging radiation. Most of the UVB is also filtered out by the ozone layer, but enough gets through that it can give us tans and sunburns if we are not careful. The majority of the UV light that gets through, however, is UVA, which is responsible for skin cancers and melanomas. It can penetrate the skin deeper, causing serious damage and premature ageing of the skin cells.

A quick side note: despite what we are often told, the sun's rays are good for us in small amounts. We only get 10 per cent of vitamin D from our food; the rest we absorb from the sun. While tanning may not be healthy, full body exposure to the sun for a few minutes a day, a few days a week, is not only healthy, but is necessary to our wellbeing. Additionally, if moderation is used, it will not hurt your tattoo.

The two types of creams that are used for protection from the sun's rays are known as chemical absorbers and surface blockers. The first, chemical absorbers (pretty much any creams that aren't white zinc oxide or titanium dioxide), work by being applied to the skin and then reacting with the UV rays as they penetrate the skin by absorbing the energy and dissipating it through heat. Most of these creams are geared towards the UVB wavelength to prevent sunburns, so while you may not be getting burnt, you may be exposing yourself to copious amounts of UVA rays which can cause cell mutation, early ageing and massively increase your chances of getting skin cancer.

It follows that these creams do absolutely nothing to protect your tattoo pigments from UV damage. They might filter out some of the UV rays, but certainly not all, and your ink will be irreversibly changed. Tattoo inks are not lightfast, meaning they fade. UV rays break down the chemical structure of the pigments and degrade them. It's just like leaving a picture in the sun or a painting by the window – it fades out and is eventually destroyed. We've seen bright pink turn to brown after one afternoon in the sun as the radiation completely changes the chemical composition of the pigment. Full sleeves can turn murky after only a few exposures to the sun and never make it back to their former glory. What a waste!

I'm constantly admonishing my clients: Stay out of the fucking sun! The thing with sun creams is that they must be applied 30 minutes before exposure to actually work, and then reapplied every 90-120 minutes to continue working. It's even more often if your swim or sweat. I don't know anyone who is that dedicated on a regular basis.

And then there are the health factors. There is some scientific correlation between a few of the chemical absorbers and the acceleration of some skin cancers. When applied, these chemicals are absorbed through the skin where they enter the bloodstream and wreak havoc on the immune system. Artificial fragrances, just by themselves, may contain dozens of carcinogenic chemicals that damage the liver, the heart, and even promote systemic cancer. Some of the other chemicals in sun creams are known endocrine disruptors, which can have a negative impact on pre-cancerous cells and hormone levels.



With all the other things that can ruin our health, do we really need to rub this stuff all over our bodies? If you must use it, make sure to find a broad-spectrum UVA-UVB infrared cream and use as directed. Bear in mind, however, that a lot of these creams are known irritants, so patch test on yourself first to make sure you're not allergic.

So what's best for your tattoo? The answer lies in the second type of cream that we mentioned earlier: the surface blocker. Simple and time-tested, white zinc oxide or titanium dioxide creams are inert, do not absorb into the skin, and completely block all spectrum UV rays from damaging your skin or your ink. The white shiny cream reflects and scatters the UV radiation away from you, keeping you safe and your ink perfect and bright every time.

It should be noted that this type of cream isn't perfect: it also blocks the vitamin D from reaching your body, so make sure you do get very small amounts of unprotected sun exposure occasionally. Vitamin D is, after all, the number one cancer-fighting agent, and skin cancer can be brought on by a vitamin D deficiency.

There is also invisible zinc cream. I don't recommend it, as it doesn't offer the overall protection and reflection of a traditional white zinc. Additionally, the nanoparticles of the invisible zinc are absorbed into your skin and can be converted into free radicals by sun exposure, actually causing harm. Go figure!

At the end of the day, if you're a keen collector of colourful tattoos then you have to make a choice: the tattoos or the sun. You can't have both. Going with

black-only tattoos, or black-and-grey-shaded work, is an option, but the sun will still fade these over time.

At the very least, my advice is to let your new tattoo spend at least a season completely out of the sun so it can settle into the skin. The quickest way to ruin a new tattoo is immediate exposure, as the newly formed skin of a fresh tattoo has no natural sun blocking capabilities. If you wish to hit the beaches for any subsequent summers, it's simply a matter of being smart and following some of the advice outlined above.

Catch me on facebook for more updates of this nature and recent tattoo pictures. Enjoy your summer! ☺

"DO NOT apply any sun creams to your tattoo until it is fully healed and smooth and there are no scabs present, usually about 10 days time, maybe longer depending on your healing,"

*Kian Forreal is a professional tattoo artist with 17 years international experience and who specialises in traditional Japanese tattoo work and script lettering. He has worked all over world and has studied under some the leading tattoo artists of today. He is based in Sydney at Inner Vision Tattoo in Surry Hills. His website is: [www.kianforreal.com](http://www.kianforreal.com) For information on Laser Tattoo Fading and Removal please visit [www.fadeyourtattoo.com](http://www.fadeyourtattoo.com)*

