

Tattoos and breastfeeding

Tattooing is a form of body modification and self-expression which is increasing in prevalence, especially among young women. Therefore, it is important for health professionals to be knowledgeable about the implications tattooing may pose for breastfeeding.

References

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Currently, no data exists regarding the safety of tattooing during breastfeeding. Furthermore, no complications pertaining to an infant have been reported after a mother has acquired a tattoo when breastfeeding. Nonetheless, opinion favours not acquiring a new tattoo when breastfeeding due to theoretical risks relating to transmission of pigments or infections to the infant. As a precaution in the United States, blood donation is not allowed for 12 months after acquiring a tattoo. The **Australian Red Cross** indicates that if the tattoo was done in a licensed or regulated studio and is healing well that one can donate plasma. However if it wasn't done in a licensed or regulated studio (or one wishes to donate something other than plasma such as blood or platelets) there is a 4 month waiting period.

The theoretical risks associated with acquiring a tattoo when breastfeeding include:

- Possible infant exposure to infection via breastmilk if the mother is inoculated with micro-organisms (from local infection) or blood-transmitted diseases (eg HIV or hepatitis). However, the risk of acquiring infection is likely very low, especially in tattoo studios which uphold strict hygiene and sterilisation rules.
- Potential infant exposure through breastmilk to chemicals found in tattoo ink. Tattoo ink is made of metallic salts and potentially toxic products. The large size of the molecules in these agents makes them unlikely to be transferred to breastmilk. However, the presence of tiny nanoparticles in tattoo ink reopens this question.
- It is important for tattoo studios and artists to be registered with various government bodies (which vary state by state) to ensure hygiene and health and safety standards are regulated and studios are inspected regularly in order to remain registered.

Overall, data about the risks of receiving a tattoo during breastfeeding is non-existent. However, it remains prudent to suggest the tattoo be performed once weaning has occurred.



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