



## **Lowe Plastic Surgery (LPS)**

### **Dr. Lowe's Facts about Surgical Tattoo Removal**

#### **Will my tattoo be fully removed with surgery?**

Tattoo removal can be performed using a variety of techniques that include: chemicals, dermabrasion, lasers, or surgery. Laser tattoo removal involves often expensive technology, and it can be unpredictable and time consuming. Most of the lack of predictability with laser tattoo removal is the tattoo itself. What is the color of the tattoo? Was it professionally done? Most discontent with laser tattoo removal relates to the cost, discomfort, and time associated with laser tattoo treatments. Different lasers are required based on its color and the patient's skin type. Black or dark green tattoos on light skinned patients are usually the easiest tattoos to treat. The vast majority of laser tattoo removal takes 7-15 treatments to remove 90% of the tattoo. The laser focuses on thermal disruption of the tattoo dye treated multiple times. Most patients do not have the patience or finances to fully complete laser tattoo removal. Surgery can often be used to remove tattoos in just one or two surgeries depending on size and location. A consultation with a board certified Plastic Surgeon can help patients decide what option may be best for them. Please check out our website at [www.drjlowe.com](http://www.drjlowe.com)

#### **How effective are over-the-counter remedies?**

No over the counter remedies are effective at removing tattoos that have been present for some time. Medically prescribed topical skin regimens are usually ineffective as well. Many patients attempt to treat tattoos on their own, but very few patients see any noticeable improvement. Patients are best served to save their money for professional treatment of tattoo with surgery or laser. Most topical skin programs include a skin lightener (Hydroquinone) which may lighten a tattoo by 5-10%. Almost no over-the-counter treatment can provide effective dosing without a physician prescription or supervision. Your physician or health care professional can help you develop a legitimate treatment that is right for you. Tattoo removal is far more painful and expensive the cost of the tattoo itself.

#### **What do you think about micro-peels, micro-dermabrasion, or dermabrasion?**

Minimally invasive procedures are associated with minimal results. These procedures are best performed at a spa and are usually quite safe when performed by a professional. Most patients report small improvements in the tattoo color at best. It is difficult to know how many minimal treatments it would take to equal a standard laser treatment. Dermabrasion can be effective but requires anesthetic and leaves a unsightly scar. Dr. Lowe is committed to a true clinically effective tattoo treatment such as laser tattoo removal, and leaves the feel good treatments to the medical spas and aestheticians.

#### **What is the best laser for Tattoo removal?**

There are a number of lasers that are popular in laser tattoo removal. The most popular device is the Q switch ND-Yag laser. The laser can target black, blue, and red most effectively. Light green and yellow sometimes require a special laser to be effective. Laser tattoo removal is associated with significant discomfort and recovery. Some patients require local anesthetic and pain medication before or after treatment. No laser tattoo removal is effective with only one treatment. The cost of laser tattoo removal may in some cases decrease as the tattoo fades and less laser pulses are required.

#### **Are there substantial risks related to laser tattoo removal?**

All laser procedures are associated with a certain amount of risk. The risks are often associated with a patient's skin color or consistency. Darker skin types are at a higher risk of scarring and hypopigmentation (white spots). All laser procedures must be adjusted and formulated appropriately for skin types. The risk of laser tattoo removal include: poor aesthetic results, bruising, swelling, crusting, hyperpigmentation, hypopigmentation, virus activation, and scarring. The deeper the laser treatment, the higher the risk. The deeper and more aggressive the laser treatment, the quicker the results in most cases. Laser tattoo removal is always a balance between "pain & gain." Your board certified plastic surgeon or dermatologist can assist you with choosing the treatment that is right for you.

**Are there substantial risks related to surgical tattoo removal?**

All surgical tattoo removal procedures are associated with a certain amount of risk. The risks are often associated with a patient's skin color or consistency. Darker skin types are at a higher risk of scarring from surgical scar removal. The risk of surgical tattoo removal include: bleeding, infection, damages to adjacent structures, pain, scar, need for revision, and need for staged surgical procedures. The deeper and larger the tattoo the higher the risk of surgical complications. Larger tattoos often require multiple serial excisions, tissue expansion, or skin grafts. The most unpredictable risk of surgical tattoo removal is the quality of the scar in the future. Scar treatment before and after surgery is critical in determining the success of the surgery. Your board certified plastic surgeon or dermatologist can assist you with choosing the treatment that is right for you.

**Is surgical tattoo removal painful or time consuming?**

Surgical tattoo removal is usually performed in the office with topical numbing cream. A number of patients require sedation in advance with a medication by mouth. A surgical treatment usually requires 1-2 hours to perform depending on the size and location of the tattoo. Some surgical tattoo removal required surgery at a surgical facility or at a hospital under general anesthetic. Most patients find surgical tattoo removal to be uncomfortable but tolerable under local anesthetic. Patient should expect to experience at least a 2-3 week recovery after surgery. Most patients who undergo surgical tattoo removal return to light duty within several days. Dr. Lowe will review the length of surgery and the recovery at the time of you clinical consultation.

**How much does surgical tattoo removal cost?**

The cost of surgical tattoo removal is determined by time, location, and complexity of the procedure. Surgical tattoo removal is considered a cosmetic procedure not covered by health insurance. The cost of the surgical procedure depends not only on the removal but the complexity of the closure. Most patients will require a number of post-surgical follow-up appointments and many will need to follow an aggressive scar treatment program for months after surgery. The cost of the surgical procedure does not include the cost of future treatments, complications, or surgical revisions. The practice will be able to provide you with the cost of surgical tattoo removal after your professional consultation.

**When do you offer surgical tattoo removal procedures?**

All patients considering surgical tattoo removal are required to see Dr. Lowe in consultation prior to treatment. Some patient may not schedule surgery for several months after consultation depending on their schedule or time of year. Our practice provides surgical tattoo removal at set time points throughout the calendar month. We usually perform surgery on Wednesday mornings every 2 weeks depending on the schedule. We will often open extra surgical days as the schedule permits or as demand increases. Patients may check with our office for the surgical dates that are available after consultation.

**Can surgical tattoo removal be combined with other procedures?**

Surgical tattoo removal can be combined with other cosmetic treatments. Patients may elect to undergo breast enhancement at the same time as a tattoo is removed. Other cosmetic procedures can often be added without a substantial increase in risk. Most surgical tattoo removals are quite limited allowing for a variety of other cosmetic treatment options. Some patients undergo BOTOX application on the same day as surgical tattoo removal when scheduled in advance. However, more lengthy cosmetic procedures may not be possible duet to time limitations or safety concerns. Surgical treatments must be performed efficiently and properly on surgical days to ensure the most cost effective and safe patient care. Patients who are interested in doing more than one cosmetic treatment on the day of surgery are encouraged to check with our office in advance.

### **What is the downtime associated with surgical tattoo removal?**

In our practice, surgical tattoo removal is usually performed by the board certified plastic surgeon. Dr. Lowe is committed to providing patients with an effective and safe surgical treatment. The downtime associated with the typical surgery is less than 3 weeks. The patients are often able to return to work the same day or the day after as long as they are able to limit activity or heavy lifting. Most patients are comfortable in public places after several days with full scar maturation taking up to 6 months to 2 years. Every patient has different skin and different expectations or definitions about down-time. Patients should undergo tattoo removal at least 4 weeks prior to a major event such as a wedding or anniversary. A patient may elect to have a more or less aggressive treatment based on their clinical or social situation. Dr. Lowe and our staff can provide you with further information about downtime and recovery during your cosmetic consultation.

### **Is surgical tattoo removal right for me?**

In most cases, surgical tattoo removal is not something that a patient needs; it is something a patient wants. There is a financial and personal cost for patients who desire tattoo removal. There are a variety of options to treat tattoos. These include dermabrasion, laser, and surgical treatments to name just a few. Surgical tattoo removal is best on smaller tattoos, in beneficial locations, and that are unresponsive to laser treatment. Surgical tattoo removal ensures complete tattoo removal in a reliable time frame at a limited cost. The surgery is not associated with undue risk in most cases. Most patients report the surgical tattoo removal was much easier than expected. No cosmetic procedure is without risk or cost, but surgical tattoo removal is often a good option for patients needing to get rid of tattoos due to professional or work related concerns. Patients should carefully weigh the pros and cons of surgical tattoo removal before scheduling the procedure. Each patient tattoo is unique, a consultation with a Board Certified Plastic Surgeon or Dermatologist can help you determine what options best suite your situation and pocket book. Surgical tattoo removal is often the right thing for the right person. For further information check out our website or other helpful links at [www.drjlowe.com](http://www.drjlowe.com)

### **What are Dr. Lowe's take home points?**

1. The success of surgical tattoo removal depends on the most on the tattoo itself.
2. Understand risks (bleeding, infection, damage to adjacent structures, pain, scar, and need for revision).
3. Laser tattoo removal is often a better option, but will require 10-15 treatments in most cases.
4. The cost of surgical treatment depends on time, location, and complexity.
5. Stage tattoo removal may be required in large tattoos to avoid tissue expansion or large reconstruction..
6. The more aggressive the treatment the quicker the tattoo will fade.
7. Most patients tolerate surgical tattoo removal under local anesthetic
8. Post-surgical scar management is critical to the success of surgical tattoo removal.
9. Most patients require 2-3 weeks to recover from surgery and up to 2 years for the scar to fully mature..
10. Surgeon certification and safety matters when undergoing any cosmetic surgical procedure.